

CJR

COLUMBIA
JOURNALISM
REVIEW

MAY/JUNE 2001
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JAY HARRIS
AND THE
PRESSURE FOR PROFITS

IDA TARBELL: TIMELESS MODEL



STAYING  ON TARGET

THE INVESTIGATORS



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The Kansas City Star

"To Protect and Collect"

An investigation of police and federal agents working together to evade the Missouri forfeiture law, in effect giving police millions of dollars in seized drug money that should have gone to education.

FINALISTS

Chicago Tribune

"The Failure of the Death Penalty in Illinois" and "State of Execution: The Death Penalty in Texas"

Ken Armstrong and Steve Mills

An investigation into the death penalty in Illinois and Texas, which found a capital punishment system riddled with faulty evidence, unscrupulous trial tactics and legal incompetence.

NBC 5 Chicago (WMAQ-TV)

"Strip-Searches at O'Hare"

Renee Ferguson

A two-year ongoing investigation of U.S. Customs practices in which black

women were targeted for invasive strip searches on the basis of racial and gender profiling.

Orange County Register

"The Body Brokers"

Mark Katches, William Heisel, Ronald Campbell, Sharon Henry, Michael Goulding, Rebecca Allen and Tracy Wood

A five-part investigation which detailed the profits, ethical conflicts and lax government oversights of the growing trade in human body parts.

ABC News, World News Tonight

"The Money Trail"

Brian Ross, Rhonda Schwartz, Vic Walter, Jill Rackmill, David Scott, Dawn Goeb, Jud Marvin,

Gary Fairman, John DeTarzio, Dow Haynor, Stuart Schutzman, Paul Slavin and Paul Friedman

An investigation into the corrupting influence of soft money in politics, focusing on the usually well-hidden, lavish parties thrown during the Republican and Democratic conventions.

Seattle Post-Intelligencer

"Uncivil Action"

Andrew Schneider and Carol Smith

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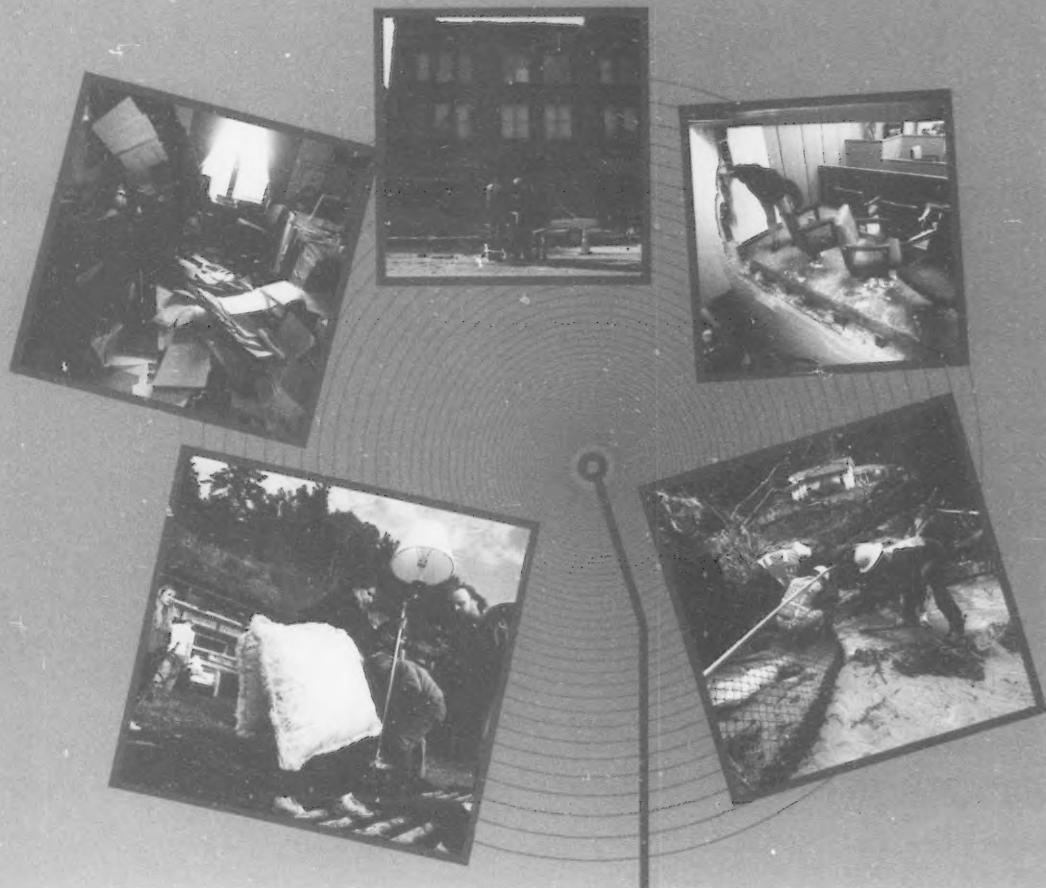
The Goldsmith Prize for Investigative Reporting is an annual award of \$25,000 which honors the journalist or journalists whose investigative reporting in a story or series of related stories best promotes more effective and ethical conduct of government, the making of public policy, or the practice of politics.

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For more about the Seattle earthquake, go to www.seattlepi-i.com/quake.



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TODAY

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TOMORROW

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"A squirrel short-circuited the garage door."

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BIG-APPLE BLUES

Brent Cunningham's article about the influence of New York on how news is decided and presented to America ("Manhattan Mindset," CJR, March/April) quotes me as saying I always thought that was bullshit. I was not misquoted. Cunningham and I did, however, spend about a half hour on the telephone during which I went into some detail on just why I thought it was bullshit. But I was left in the article with the one quoted sentence looking, it seemed to me, somewhat of a horse's ass.

Having retired after almost half a century of a reasonably honorable and sometimes recognized career as a journalist, I feel badly used to be memorialized as the one falsely crying bullshit in the crowded amphitheater of media navel-gazing. I should have much preferred not being quoted at all.

Not that I retreat from my opinion. As a Canadian who came to New York as an adult, I believe that almost all the important positions in the national media organizations headquartered in New York are occupied by people from somewhere else. I have seen such people ignore stories taking place in the metropolitan area that were clearly of national interest because they were "too New York." A classmate of mine in the very building you are located in was the last of us to get a job — not until late August! — because, he thought, he spoke with a

New York speech pattern. Not "toidy-toid street" or anything like that, but not the way people speak in Iowa or Utah.

The thesis was bullshit thirty or so years ago when it provided Edward Jay Epstein with the core argument of his book, *News From Nowhere*. (He later went on to write spy stories.)



New York is not where the news is made but it is where it is gathered. The reasons are historical rather than logical. Perhaps it would make sense to build a new city somewhere in the

heartland where all news channels would converge, a sort of Brasilia of news. I am not sure it would give less weight to news from the New York Stock Exchange, but it might.

When I was charged with running NBC News, the managers of a California affiliate would harass me about our nightly newscast arriving in the Pacific time zone three hours early, with whatever updating bulletins were necessary being inserted sometimes awkwardly into the videotape replay. After a couple of years of this I proposed to them that we do the newscast in Pacific time and update it three hours earlier.

Another thing bothers me, which I did not discuss with Cunningham. There is a certain way of saying New York in discussions of public matters which really means Jewish. I know that was not in Cunningham's mind or in those of the people he talked to. But it nags.

REUVEN FRANK
Tenafl, New Jersey

Maybe its the fact I'm a Reuters correspondent, but I found it quite strange to see a Manhattan Media Map with no mention of the world's largest news service — especially with our upcoming move to that flashy new building on Times Square (between *The New York Times* and Forty-second Street).

JIM BRUMM

North Brunswick, New Jersey

As delighted as I was to be quoted and photographed on more than one page in the latest issue of CJR, I was horrified to read the snide-sounding sidebar on the Committee to Protect Journalists dinner ("No Degrees of Separation," CJR, March/April).

It was bad enough that it trivializes an event and an organization that helps protect journalists and press freedoms that are under fire throughout the world. It was worse that it denigrated and held up to ridicule Jessica Seigel, a colleague of mine who happens to be a former *Chicago Tribune* correspondent and currently a journalism instructor at New York University.

Ironically, she was trying to give some aid, advice, and encouragement to the writer, who seemed like the nervous and inexperienced student journalist most of us have been at one time or another. Her reward was to be portrayed as though she were some sort of sensuous party crasher (and to have her name misspelled!).

In fact, she was my guest. If anything, your "reporter" was the interloper, searching in vain for something he kept calling the "media elite," without ever defining it.

I know that "edge" journalism is supposed to be all the rage these days, but first our

CONGRATULATIONS TO JUDY THOMAS, WM PITZER, AND ROY WENZL FOR MAKING A DIFFERENCE

Each year, the Society of Professional Journalists/Sigma Delta Chi awards recognize the country's most outstanding journalistic work.

This year, Knight Ridder newspapers were honored with three winners.

The Kansas City Star's Judy Thomas won for her gutsy investigative series on the Catholic priesthood and the AIDS epidemic.

Wm Pitzer of The Charlotte Observer won for his yearlong graphics work on the raising of the Civil War submarine, H.L. Hunley.



And The Wichita Eagle's Roy Wenzl won for his serial narrative, "The Hero's Son," telling the story of how a young boy who lost his father to war came to finally grieve the loss nearly 50 years later.

All of us at Knight Ridder are very proud of the contributions these individuals have made to their papers, their communities and our craft. They exemplify the best of Knight Ridder's commitment to excellence in journalism.

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- Duluth (Minn.) News-Tribune
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young journalists must be
taught to be good, old-fash-
ioned reporters before they try
to be Tom Wolfe or Hunter
Thompson.

I have long admired CJR
and will continue to support
its goals. Too bad you drop-
ped the ball on this one.

CLARENCE PAGE
Syndicated columnist
Chicago Tribune
Washington, D.C.

The editors reply: CJR's article
was an attempt to portray big-
media party life in a light-
hearted way, from the view-
point of a beginning journalist.
It was not intended to demean
Jessica Seigel in any way, and we
are sorry it was so perceived.

I had two problems with
Vikram Sura's piece, "My
Search for the Media Elite."

First, the question driving
his article ("Does a media elite
exist?") was terribly simplistic.
Here he was in the middle of
what appeared to be a conven-
tion of elites, asking whether a
media elite existed. Why not
approach Rooney, Wallace, or
Page and ask them: "As part of
the media elite, how do you
stay connected with the com-
mon person?" The notion of
whether they are a "part" of the
elite should go without ques-
tion: they have an income that
places them in the upper strata
of society and they have the at-
tention of those who matter.

Second, his crush on Jessica
Seigel was almost embarrass-
ing. I found it to be better suit-
ed for his private diary rather
than in an article that has the
circulation and audience that
CJR has.

My suggestion to Vikram:
take Seigel's interviewing class

— that way he gets to learn the
art of the interview and can
get close to a woman who suits
his fancy.

CHRISTOPHER S. KELLEY
Department of Political
Science
Miami University
Oxford, Ohio

How can you have a list of 200
NYC "Shapers" and not list the
black publishing mogul Keith
T. Clinkscales of Vanguard
Media, Inc. (former c.e.o. of
Vibe magazine who now pub-
lishes *Savoy*, *Honey*, *Impact*,
and *Heart and Soul*) at least as
"on the rise"? He has done (and
continues to do) for black pub-
lishing what Bill Gates has
done for home computing!

ALONA WILLIAMS
The African Flower
Harrisburg, Pennsylvania

If I have to choose between *The
New York Times* keeping the
national focus on New York
and what happens when NYT
reporters are let out of their
cage to explore the boondocks,
I'll take the former, thank you.

Those of us in the real world
find amusing the regular front-
page *Times* features that belong
in a section called "Southerners
Are Stupid." Stories that shout
"Look at what the hicks are do-
ing now!" expose the deep
provincialism and insecurity
from which New Yorkers suffer.

Our local newspapers may
never win a Pulitzer, but at a
minimum they know that what
the county magistrates are up
to goes above the fold, and
Rudy's museum follies below.

LISA AUG
Frankfort, Kentucky

I was very excited to see your
coverage of New York as a me-



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dia power shaping the rest of the nation's news, that is until I came across the Media Map and found a gaping hole. You mention Condé Nast, Time Inc., Hearst — Is Hachette Filipacchi not worthy? With over eighteen titles, I beg to differ, especially since I work here.

KRISTEN O'BRIEN
Editor, *Elle.com*
New York, New York

The March/April issue of *CJR* is like *People* magazine covering the elite's ritzy parties. Did I miss something? Was this issue meant to be a parody?

WILLIAM E. MCSORLEY
Carmichael, California

JOURNALISM 101

I trust you will compose a Dart in your next issue for the craven display of the school in telling its students not to reveal what Al Gore had to say in his first lecture there. That a school of journalism, this school of journalism, encourages an "off-the-record" appearance by a public figure sends the absolute wrong message to its students and alumni. Off-the-record is the enemy of good reporters everywhere, useful only to those sycophants and suck-ups who bask in the reflected glory of public figures. The minute a public official says "off the record" ethical reporters get up and walk out knowing full well that the official is trying to influence events without taking responsibility. That is what the students at Columbia should have been taught.

PHILIP SCHEFFLER
Executive editor, *60 Minutes*
New York, New York

Floyd Abrams, in "A Different Kind of Lesson" (*CJR*, March/April) writes: "... it was announced that what he [Al Gore] would say [to his students] would be off the record Within a day, the ... announcement was made that students could ... tell anyone ... what [he] had to say. Noth-

ing was off the record "[T]he effort to prevent disclosure of what Gore had to say was doomed from the start The ... notion ... of silencing students about what they heard in Gore's class was a non-starter Is it ... conceivable that what he said to ... students could possibly be treated as confidential?"

To whom was the initial announcement made — to the students or to reporters or both? Abrams doesn't say.

If it was made to students, it is certainly conceivable that they would honor it. To think otherwise is to insult the students. Moreover, any student who did not honor the request would seriously jeopardize any journalistic career he or she might be planning. After all, they surely know by this point in their studies that "off the record" means "not for publication; not to be quoted." If the announcement was made to reporters, then it was a perfectly appropriate step to take.

JESSE S. COOK III
Charleston, South Carolina

PASTEURIZED MILK STORY?

While Steve Wilson and I appreciate Larry Grossman's honest effort to analyze what happened in our successful whistleblower lawsuit against Fox Television (*CJR*, March/April), we found some of his conclusions a little curious. Apparently without comparing stories side by side, he reported that there was "hardly any difference in substance" between the story we wanted to run and the one that Fox finally did broadcast a month after we filed our lawsuit. Had he asked, we could have pointed to the independent report of the *St. Louis Journalism Review*, which documented nearly a dozen differences, "some profound and some subtle." The jury that awarded me \$425,000 also concluded that the report Fox pressured us to air was "a

false, distorted, or slanted news report."

But more important, based only on the legal documents associated with our lawsuit and the fact that my reporting partner Steve Wilson was an aggressive advocate for himself at trial, Grossman has decided that Steve was "a supposedly righteous David" whose passion interfered with his professional obligation to present a solid report. At trial, even Fox news managers and lawyers testified they never found a single factual error in any of the eighty-three versions we submitted and they refused to broadcast. Were we passionate about reporting what others so badly wanted to cover up, without fear or favor to big advertisers and potential litigants? Guilty as charged, Mr. Grossman, but you never did tell us: Just what is the proper conduct when reporters are pressured by their own news organization to broadcast facts they know and have shown to be false and misleading?

JANE AKRE
Palm Harbor, Florida

Larry Grossman replies: *The CJR fact-checker and I independently screened the three-part investigative series produced and reported by Nathan Lang, which WTVT broadcast, and a version produced by Akre and Wilson, which was not broadcast. We both concluded that the Lang pieces told the BGH-produced milk story clearly and effectively. More important, Akre misstates the jury's finding in the trial. The Verdict Forms, signed by the foreperson, show that the jury was instructed to answer two questions: 1. Do you find that WTVT terminated Akre's or Wilson's employment "because she (or he) opposed or refused to participate in the broadcast of a false, distorted, or slanted news report ... ?" The jury answered "No" in the case of both plaintiffs; 2. Do you find that WTVT terminated Akre's or Wilson's employment "because*

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you're not
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she (or he) threatened to disclose to the FCC under oath, in writing, the broadcast of a false, distorted or slanted news report which she (or he) reasonably believed would violate the prohibition against intentional falsification or distortion of the news . . . if it were aired?" [emphasis added]. In Wilson's case the jury answered "No" to that question, too. In Akre's case the jury answered "Yes," and awarded her damages because it thought she was fired for threatening to blow the whistle on the station.

PLUGGED-IN OUTLET

I was excited to see your March/April item on the changes on the journalistic scene in Los Angeles, but my excitement turned to chagrin when I discovered that you failed to mention the remarkable things going on at local public radio station KPCC. Until the past few months, L.A.

was the only major market in the U.S. that didn't have a strong public radio newsroom. We set out to rectify that. Last fall we hired our first full-time reporters; the three of them have already garnered several awards for their work. You can't get the complete picture of what's going on in L.A. news without listening to KPCC.

PAUL GLICKMAN
News director, KPCC
Pasadena, California

THE PUSH FOR CLOSURE

Robert Baugher certainly makes his case for the media's need to have a quick and easy solution to loss ("How Long, According to the Media, Should Grief Last?" CJR, March/April). But I wish he had speculated a little more about why the media have this strange compulsion to have the process of loss tied up in a neat bow. From where I sit, answers that are complicated

and difficult are just not what a McPress deals with these days.

SCOTT CULLEN-BENSON
Oakdale, Minnesota

BETRAYED

Re: Christopher Hanson's "All The News That Fits The Myth" (CJR, January/February): the only thing I can say is thank you. Since the election, I no longer trust the fourth estate. I doubt I ever will again.

DEBBIE RAY
South Bend, Indiana

CORRECTIONS

Several errors crept into the March/April CJR. The name of the editor of *Essence* magazine is Monique Greenwood, not Monica. Phyllis McGrady works at ABC News, not NBC News. The first names of CNBC anchors Bartiromo and Ker-

nan are, respectively, Maria and Joe, not Marie and Jim. The CBS Sports anchor is Jim Nantz, not Nance. Jay Harris was misidentified as the editor of the *San Jose Mercury News*; at the time of the writing, he was the paper's publisher. The co-author of the book *Fame At Last* is Jill Jonnes, not Jones, as the dust-jacket had it. The inside map centered on the *Orange County Register* failed to formally acknowledge what the editors assumed was obvious: it was inspired by Saul Steinberg's classic *New Yorker* cover of 1976 — "A View of the World from Ninth Avenue." CJR's reproduction of that cover, which appeared on page 52 of the issue, carried an inaccurate credit line. It should have read as follows: Copyright©1976 The New Yorker Magazine, Inc. Reprinted by permission of the Estate of Saul Steinberg/Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York, and The New Yorker/Condé Nast Publications, Inc.

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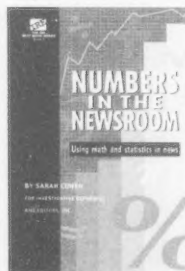
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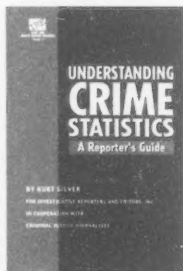
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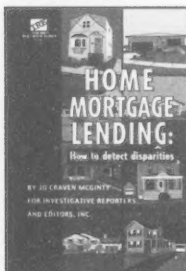
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The Los Angeles Times congratulates David Willman on winning a Pulitzer Prize – the 25th Pulitzer for The Times. Congratulations also to all of our 2001 Pulitzer finalists, more finalists than any other newspaper this year.

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Criticism

Richard E. Meyer
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Maura Reynolds
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Los Angeles Times staff
Breaking News Reporting

Los Angeles Times
latimes.com

CURRENTS

IN REVIEW: NEW MEDIA'S NEWEST NOTES

Phase one of online journalism began with a revolutionary song and ended on a sour chord. Now, maybe, some strains of phase two are audible.

THE SOLOISTS

What do these political "me-zines" mean?

Since last fall, Andrew Sullivan (andrewsullivan.com), a former editor of *The New Republic*; Virginia Postrel (dynamist.com), a former editor of *Reason*; Joshua Marshall (j-marshall.com), a former writer and editor at *The American Prospect*; and Joanne Jacobs (readjacobs.com), a former *San Jose Mercury News* columnist, have all joined Mickey Kaus with one-person sites that are part e-zine, part Weblog, and part vanity. Kaus's kausfiles.com helped pioneer the "me-zine" genre among journalists.

Their defining feature is a daily stream of (mostly) political commentary and observation on everything from the spy-plane flap with China to the role of welfare in the emergence of hip-hop. At their best these columns — with names like *Daily Dish*, *The Scene*, and *Hit Parade* — achieve a spontaneous, thinking-out-loud quality that is both digestible and provocative. "Informed small-talk," is how Marshall describes it. After watching EPA chief Christine Whitman repeatedly refuse to answer Wolf Blitzer's question about whether she supported drilling in the Arctic National Wildlife Reserve, for example, Marshall wrote in his *Talking Points*: "Aren't the Democrats going to see this as blood in the water? Cut to thirty-second TV ad... deep male voice intones: 'The president wants to trash the Alaskan wilderness to help big oil. Even his own EPA chief knows it's wrong.' Isn't she in some trouble?"

There's not much money in the me-zine so far. In February, Amazon.com began a voluntary payment system that allows readers to put their money where their mouse is. By early April, Sullivan had taken in nearly \$9,000 through the Amazon system and direct contributions. Kaus had just over \$1,000 through Amazon; Postrel netted \$630 through Amazon and \$100 through PayPal, another payment system she uses; Marshall, the last of the group to add the pay feature, had less than \$1,000. "Right now we're a joke from a business standpoint," says Sullivan. Two days after saying that, though, he met with his partner in New York to discuss "the next phase." An archive of Sullivan's book reviews is in the works, and perhaps an interactive book club. His site got 120,000 unique visitors in March. Soon, Sullivan says, he will try to tempt a sponsor.

So why do the authors spend hours (Sullivan is up until two most mornings; Postrel does her own coding and troubleshooting) on these sites? Freedom to write what they want, when they want, is an obvious draw. But maybe something more fundamental is happening between writers and readers. "There is a general trend toward more individual voices, and the Web has accelerated that," says Postrel. For a writer, what bigger thrill than having hundreds of people come each day to read, ponder, and respond to their musings? And for the reader, the me-zine shrinks "mass media" to an accessible level. Feedback, as well as the voluntary payments, is to a person, not a publication, and

thus a more direct form of attention.

There is a give-and-take in these relationships; readers often correct, amend, and elaborate on the things they read, and the writers often incorporate these new perspectives and bits of information into later items, usually with a nod to the source. Readers peppered Sullivan with information about the case of Jesse Dirkhsing — the Arkansas teen who was raped and killed by a gay couple in 1999 — until he wrote a short item on his site about the dearth of coverage. Sullivan later expanded the item into a column for *The New Republic*. This incubator quality is an unexpected boon of the me-zine.

Last month, *Slate* endorsed the phenomenon by creating a

portal site that bundles links to the Kaus, Sullivan, Postrel, and Marshall me-zines. Others may be added. "The relationship between publishers, writers, and editors is going to change," says *Slate*'s editor, Michael Kinsley. "This is just a way to acknowledge something interesting going on in political journalism."

Maybe in six months these me-zines will be dead. But maybe not. Maybe big media will scoop up the best ones. Maybe a group of writers will contribute to a single site, theoretically making it easier to sell ads and find sponsors. Maybe some will get popular enough on their own to have sponsors. "It's a terrific forum," says Jacobs. "The question is, Can it be sustained?"

— Brent Cunningham

FOLLOW THE BOUNCING BRILL

A couple of things are worth noting about the complicated coupling last month of Brill Media Holdings and Powerful Media, parent company of *Inside.com*.

First, *Brill's Content*, the media watchdog magazine, is gone after June, replaced by an *Inside Content* hybrid that Steve Brill has described as "a high-end business magazine for the new leaders in the media world." Ad sales at *Content* never took off as hoped, according to an *Inside.com* report, in part because the magazine saw itself as a consumer publication but was viewed more as a trade.

Second, the deal turns on a new wrinkle in the effort to find business models that work online. The idea is to tap the relatively stable (employers often get the bill) world of trade mag-

azines and newsletters. In January, Brill and Primedia struck a deal that made Brill part owner and c.e.o. of Media Central, a Primedia subsidiary that houses media trade publications such as *Folio* and *Cable World*.

Now, *Inside.com* becomes a portal site to these publications, and its own juicy stories will be used to entice Media Central readers to pay a little more for additional material. For example, subscribers to *Cable World* would also get access to a section on the *Inside* site that covers cable, and could get access to other sections at reduced rates.

Still, Brill is banking on the willingness of readers to pay for online content. We'll see.

— B.C.



PUFFY PRESS POLL

The gasp that rose from the pews of a Manhattan courtroom on March 16, when a jury cleared Sean "Puffy" Combs, the rap mogul, of felony gun and bribery charges, came not from the relieved defendant or the disappointed prosecutor, but from three crowded rows of reporters.

An informal poll of seventeen reporters who covered each day of the seven-week trial, conducted in the hours before the verdict, indicates that only two saw it coming. The Puffy Poll tapped the wisdom of experienced court reporters from three wire services, New York's four dailies, two news radio stations, and a smattering of other print, Internet, and television news outlets.

How could we have called it so wrong? Although most of the reporters were white and most of the jurors black, the poll didn't break along racial lines. A more likely explanation is that we were privy to some damaging evidence that was deemed too prejudicial for the jury to hear.

Or maybe, as Irene Cornell, a WCBS Radio reporter with thirty-one years covering New York trials, says, she should have listened to that sage voice in the back of her mind that said "Puffy was much too cute, had much too much charm, and was much too rich to ever go to jail."

—Laura Italiano

What do you predict the Combs verdict will be?

Full acquittal: 2
Full conviction: 0
Split Verdict: 11
Hung Jury: 4

Do you think Combs is guilty of ... firing a gun:

6 yes, 7 no, 4 don't know.
... possessing a gun:
13 yes, 4 don't know.
... bribing his chauffeur:
14 yes, 3 don't know.

LANGUAGE CORNER

WHADDYA MEAN, 'IF NOT'?

In the passages below, and in thousands like them, the little phrase "if not" is inescapably sloppy, and it can be unfair.

"... at worst, he bullied his opponents and impugned their integrity, if not their patriotism."

"Off and on for two decades, Dr. Lee's behavior was curious, if not criminal."

"If not" in both cases achieves the rarefied status of perfect ambiguity.

Did the writer mean that the subject in the first passage actually stopped short of attacking his opponents' patriotism? Did the second writer mean Dr. Lee's behavior was probably *not* criminal? Distinct possibilities, but the terse yet flabby "if not" doesn't get the reader there.

Or, perhaps more likely in these examples (and more commonly), "if not" could mean the writers wanted to imply guilt without quite coming out with the charge. That's dirty pool.

Whatever meaning is intended, saying it directly — and providing supporting evidence later — is the responsible way to go.

A third distinct possibility, a cousin of the second, is that a writer doesn't have a clue, but just wants to slip in the possibility of something ugly. That's *both* sloppy and unfair.

— Evan Jenkins

A lot more about writing right is in Language Corner at CJR's Web site, www.cjr.org.

OVER THE HILL?

The Hill parachuted into the competitive Capitol Hill reporting scene in 1994 and since then has earned respect.

Led by editor and publisher Martin Tolchin, formerly of *The New York Times*, the free weekly gives *Roll Call*, a longtime Washington favorite, a run for its money. But the newspaper chain that owns *The Hill* has taken a nose-dive.

News Communications, Inc., recently borrowed another \$1 million from its chief investor and sold most of its twenty-four papers, leaving it with *The Hill* and a handful of weeklies in and around New York City. The chain has lost money for years, and by mid-April its stock, as high as \$8 a share in 1997, had fallen to just 33 cents. NASDAQ has warned that without a big upturn, the company will be tossed off the market.

News Communications officers say they are optimistic. They were tight-lipped about the possibility of an outright sale or merger, but last November the company agreed to pay a "stay put" bonus to Paul Mastronardi, company v.p. and c.f.o., according to filings with the S.E.C.

Larry Grimes, owner of W.B. Grimes and Co., a newspaper broker, says part of News Communications' problem may be its wide distribution, which ranges from New York City to Long Is-



land. But the chain seems to have other problems. In 1999, the company ran a net loss of \$3.8 million. Yet that year it gave its new c.e.o., Steve Farbman, a generous

salary and stock awards of more than \$700,000. Chairman Jerry Finkelstein, 85, received a salary and bonuses worth \$306,544. Tolchin and Daniel Rattiner, publisher of News Communications' Dan's Papers on Long Island, each received salaries and bonuses of more than \$300,000.

Over the years, some of the chain's New York papers have taken heat for blatant editorializing in favor of certain Democratic candidates, including Andy Stein, Jerry Finkelstein's son. "Seems to me that this is an enterprise that's become a play toy for people, none of whom have demonstrated a legitimate interest in journalism," says Carl Bernstein, the Watergate reporter who was briefly on the board of News Communications in 1996.

If News Communications' stock rises, J. Morton Davis, the company's chief investor, will be smiling. Davis, of D.H. Blair Investment Banking, now owns or has an interest in 46 percent of the company's stock. D.H. Blair is known for investing in "penny stocks" and also for the unsavory past of its former affiliate, the now-defunct D.H. Blair & Co., which paid \$4.9 million in fines and customer restitution in 1997 for fraudulent brokerage practices. Melvyn I. Weiss, a lawyer and major donor to the Democratic party, is the second-largest shareholder.

— Adrienne Appel and Madeline Gaughran

CURRENTS

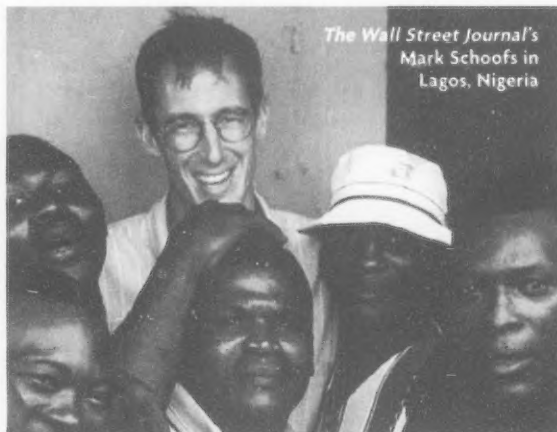
Q & A ON AIDS: THINK GLOBAL, WRITE LOCAL

In recent months, several major drug makers have agreed to sell AIDS drugs to Africa at significantly reduced rates. Sobering press reports from Africa, where an estimated 25 million people are HIV-positive, created the sense of urgency that helped bring about the change. Mark Schoofs, who won a Pulitzer last year for his coverage in *The Village Voice* of the AIDS crisis in Africa, now covers it for *The Wall Street Journal*. Mary Ellen Schoonmaker, an editorial writer at *the Record*, in northern New Jersey, caught up with Schoofs, via e-mail, in Uganda, to talk about where the story goes next:

Q: Now that the drug companies are beginning to lower prices, where does the coverage of this issue go?

A: Even at the new prices, the drugs are still expensive. The lowest price offered so far for the commonly used regimen has been \$347 per patient per year. That sounds cheap, until you put yourself in, say, Malawi. In that country, the per-capita GNP — the value of all goods and services produced in that country per person — is just \$190. So clearly, the world community — the G8, the World Bank, large companies doing business in Africa, and so forth — will have to pony up. The Harvard economist Jeffrey Sachs estimates that treatment and prevention in developing countries would cost rich countries only about \$10 per person.

That said, if the world puts up serious money, how will these complicated regimens be



delivered? AIDS is highlighting problems that have existed for ages — in this case, the lack of basic public health in most of the world. I've met people with AIDS who were subsisting on one meal a day. For them, treatment didn't mean drugs, it meant a second meal. I've visited hospitals where surgical gloves were so scarce that doctors washed them for reuse and hung them out to dry like laundry. How will such places get AIDS drugs when they can't even get other basics?

And what about the patients? American activists scream racism when anyone suggests that African patients might be less likely than their American or European counterparts to take the AIDS regimens as directed. There may be an element of racism in some of those suggestions, but it's not racist to face up to the myriad ways in which extreme poverty can undermine AIDS treatment.

So actually delivering the drugs poses tremendous problems — and, for journal-

ists, superb opportunities for stories.

Finally, AIDS raises the question of other diseases. Will AIDS be remembered as an exception, or will the world change the way it does business to make sure that, while drug companies get rewarded for innovation, new medicines for malaria, TB, and other killer diseases also are made available to poor countries quickly? There, too, lie stories galore.

Q: Is this an issue that papers other than the *Journal* and *The New York Times*, etc., can cover? Is there some aspect of the crisis that a paper in Indiana, for example, might pursue?

A: Well, if the weekly *Village Voice* can send a journalist to Africa — for six months, no less! — then just about any paper can make a contribution. If you travel on a shoestring, you will get a much more interesting, worm's-eye view of the problems.

But for reporters doing domestic work, there are ex-

tremely urgent questions. If you read most AIDS coverage — my own work included — you would think that AIDS happened only in Africa. But 30 percent of American black, gay men — 30 percent! — get infected with HIV before they turn thirty. This is a scandal.

The double stigma of racism and homophobia renders these men tragically vulnerable to disease. Hardly anyone is reporting on this, even though such fundamental social issues make the most compelling public-health journalism.

Q: Isn't this a case where journalism can rightfully claim some of the credit for helping alert the world to this crisis and bringing pressure on the drug companies to start to lower prices — a moral victory of sorts?

A: Absolutely. The fact is that journalism is a moral enterprise. Thirty-six million people and counting have a disease for which treatment exists, yet currently less than a tenth have any hope of getting that treatment. There is something profoundly wrong with this.

There is a tendency to think that just exposing a problem is enough, but it's not. AIDS has generated an astonishing amount of rhetoric, but I keep thinking about a nurse I met in remote northern Uganda. She had adopted three children from three of her AIDS patients who died. For her, all our stories have not made a difference, and I keep wondering how many more orphans she will have to take in.

TV MARTI: TIME TO GO?

Legislators, diplomats, and technical experts across the political spectrum have called Radio/TV Marti a major boondoggle, counterproductive, and almost wholly ineffective. The Miami-based, U.S.-sponsored service beams news, talk shows, and other programming into Cuba. It costs American taxpayers \$22 million a year, but is operated as a virtually wholly-owned fiefdom by the influential, politically conservative anti-Castro exiles in Florida.

Yet Presidents Reagan, Bush (the elder), and Clinton have all backed the broadcasts. Will the new administration continue that policy? One clue: In November's presidential election, Florida's Cuban-American voters — most of whom favor continuation of Radio/TV Marti — cast their ballots overwhelmingly for George W. Bush.

The radio broadcasts be-

gan in 1985, operating out of studios in Washington, D.C., under Voice of America journalistic standards of objectivity and accuracy. But three years ago, the expatriates engineered the station's move to Miami, where it fell completely under the influence of activist exiles. Immediately, its content grew more shrill, tendentious, and propagandistic. These days, barely 8 percent of Cuban homes bother to listen.

Senator Max Baucus, Democrat of Montana, in testimony before the United States International Trade Commission in September, cited research indicating that nine out of ten Cubans don't even know TV Marti exists.

"TV Marti is a total waste of taxpayers' money," says Wayne Smith, senior fellow at the Center for International Policy and former chief of the U.S. Interests Section in Havana. "It's really embarrassing."

— Neil Hickey

TECHNOLOGY CORNER

THE VIRTUAL ACQUISITION SHELF & NEWS DESK

(<http://resourceshelf.blogspot.com>)

Created by Gary Price, a librarian at George Washington University, this site can be hit or miss for journalists; but its sheer diversity of information makes it worth a look. Some examples:

- Declassified CIA documents
- Common Cause's new tobacco study
- Reporters Sans Frontieres' report, "Enemies of the Internet"
- Database of clinical trial results
- EPA's Vulnerable Zone Indicator System: enter a zip code and find local chemical threats

- New online version of The Directory of Corporate Affiliations
- National Center for Health Statistics Definitions

— Brent Cunningham

NEWSFILE

A new application for Palm-style personal digital assistants that allows you to track story ideas, build a directory of beat calls, take notes, and keep tabs on overtime and days off. It was created by Darrell Phillips, a TV reporter in Savannah, Georgia, who says he saw the need for this software less than a week after buying his Palm Pilot. It's available on his Web site at <http://go.to/newsfile> for \$13.00.

— Sreenath Sreenivasan

PREVIEW: COURT WATCH

Over the next few months, some of the nettlesome questions that have divided publishers and free-lance writers and photographers over the issue of who will control what in the digital age are likely to be answered, in a pair of court rulings.

The first, and biggest, decision is expected by late June when the U.S. Supreme Court decides in *Tasini v. New York Times*. After seven years, this has become the industry's version of Ali versus Frazier, with publishers winning round one, in U.S. District Court, and free-lancers taking round two, in the U.S. Court of Appeals.

Jonathan Tasini, president of the National Writers Union, and five other free-lancers sued *The New York Times*, Lexis-Nexis, and others, claiming that the sale of an article to a print publication does not include the right to license use of that article to an electronic database. The writers say such a move is a new use for which they must grant permission — and be paid.

The publishers argue that such databases represent not a new use, but a revision, allowable under copyright law. Oral arguments on March 28 appeared to reveal a split among the justices and most sources predict a close vote.

If the court finds for the publishers, a number of other pending legal actions go up in smoke, and free-lancers will be left reeling. "It would mean that under the statutory default rule publishers have all the rights that matter," says Emily Bass, a New York attorney who has represented writers in the Tasini case since its inception.

If the court finds for the writers, three pending class-action suits seeking damages will immediately move for-

ward. Laurence H. Tribe, who argued the publishers' case before the Supreme Court, says this would force publishers to choose between finding and paying for "hundreds of thousands" of articles, or removing the articles and "putting their newspaper like Swiss cheese with holes in it on the Internet."

While *Tasini v. New York Times* may tell us who controls what in the absence of an explicit agreement, a pending case against *The Boston Globe* could clarify just how hard a publisher can push to get an all-rights agreement.

Last year a group of writers, photographers, and graphic artists sued the *Globe* after being asked to sign a contract granting the *Globe* broad rights to their current and past work. If they didn't sign, they were told their relationship with the *Globe* was over. Some signed, some did not, but many felt that the contract, and the way it was presented, was unfair.

The *Globe* argues that the paper has the right to determine whom it will do business with and under what terms.

Indira Talwani, a lawyer for the *Globe* free-lancers, says it's not about whom the *Globe* can do business with, but how far it can go in forcing people to conform to an unfair licensing of rights. As she frames it, "The question is, did the *Globe* do something rotten?"

In January, the State Superior Court refused to dismiss the case. If writers win in *Tasini*, the Massachusetts court will try to figure out if the *Globe* did something rotten, and if so whether it was rotten enough to be illegal.

— Stephen J. Simurda

Full disclosure: Simurda, a frequent CJR contributor, is a candidate for the presidency of the National Writers Union.

DARTS & . . .

HIGH-INTEREST ISSUE

Interesting, how a seemingly straight news story can reflect a paper's editorial sympathies. Consider the way two influential dailies, on opposite coasts of the country and on opposite sides of the issue, reported to their readers about a quarter-page ad that was about to run in scores of the nation's papers, including their own; surprisingly, in the ad, George Soros, Bill Gates's father, and numerous other zillionnaires would be urging opposition to President Bush's plan for outright repeal of the controversial estate tax. At *The Seattle Times* — where publisher Frank Blethen, who despises the "death tax" as a scourge that threatens his family's ownership of the \$400 million property, has been leading a relentless campaign for repeal in editorials and full-page ads, not to mention a lop-sided op-ed page — the

anti-repeal ad provided Blethen with yet another bully pulpit, this time in the newshole. His paper's February 15 front-page report about the ad was interspersed with quotes from the publisher himself challenging its claims. In contrast, *The New York Times*, whose own editorials on the issue have been in harmony with the ad, embraced it in a February 14 page-one, above-the-fold Valentine whose twenty-four paragraphs included a miserly sixty-two-word summary of the case for repeal — a news report, as the Web site *smartertimes.com* astutely observed, that was in effect an unpaid ad for the paid one. (*Smartertimes.com* also noted that while generously quoting Warren Buffet, a strong defender of the tax, the *Times* had conveniently ignored an earlier article in its own business section on how Buffet has ensured that his son will succeed him as Berkshire Hathaway's c.e.o.)

THE WONDERFUL WORLD OF SYNERGY

So certain was KXLY-TV, an affiliate of Disney's ABC News in Spokane, Washington, of the newsworthiness of another Disney theme park opening in Anaheim, California, that the station dispatched reporter Nicole McGregor to cover the event twenty-five driving-hours away. So entertaining was McGregor's report (the roller coaster! the river run! those adorable Disney characters!) — and so informative, too (a helpful map highlighted Spokane's proximity to Anaheim) — that it became a two-part sweepstake series five minutes long. So impressed were anchors Suzanne Baylon and Richard Brown that they introduced the series thusly: "If you're making plans for spring break or summer vacation, here's an idea for you: Disney's new billion-dollar California Adventure opens Thursday . . ." while at segment's end Brown wiped away a tear brought on by all the jolly fun. And so hospitable was Disney that it supplied the photographer, the editor, and footage for the KXLY commerc — er, report.

THERE HE GOES AGAIN

Will George Will never learn? During the 1980 campaign the conservative columnist drew criticism for coaching Ronald Reagan before his televised debate with incumbent Jimmy Carter and then appearing on *Nightline* with post-debate comments about the Republican candidate's "thoroughbred" performance. Now it turns out that during the 2000 campaign, Will again stepped over the line. In a March 4 column triggered by rumors that the other George W. might not veto the "patently unconstitutional" McCain-Feingold bill, an alarmed Will reached back to the campaign for the on-the-record promise that he himself put ever-so-thoughtfully into Bush's mouth. "Around 7 A.M. January 23, 2000, the day before the Iowa caucuses," Will recalled, "candidate Bush was in Des Moines preparing to appear on ABC's *This Week*. One of those who was to question him (this columnist), not wanting to ambush him with unfamiliar material, and wanting from him a considered judgment, took the unusual step of telling Bush he would be asked if he agreed with a particular proposition from an opinion written by Justice Clarence Thomas. The proposition, given to Bush on a 3-by-5 card, was 'There is no constitutionally significant distinction between campaign contributions and expenditures. Both forms of speech are central to the First Amendment.' Asked if he agreed that there is something 'inherently hostile to the First Amendment' in limiting participation in politics by means of contributions by individuals . . . he briskly replied: 'I agree.' And asked if he thinks a president has a duty to veto [bills] he considers unconstitutional, he replied, 'I do.'" Will ended the column by warning Bush that too much "niceness" on the campaign finance issue "will cost him" respect. Better Will should worry what too much niceness in giving crib sheets to candidates will cost *him* in the public's trust.


GEOGRAPHY LESSON

News spinners, beware! In your dizzying job you may sometimes slip on a cold hard fact and fall flat on your authoritative face. That's what happened to CNN's Bill Press and Tucker Carlson on their March 14 program, *The Spin Room*. Commenting on a video clip of Secretary of State Colin Powell impolitely telling a congressional committee that President Bush was committed to moving the American


embassy from Tel Aviv to "the capital of Israel, which is Jerusalem," the spinmeisters leaped on the statement as evidence that Powell was embarrassingly uninformed. "This news came as a surprise to many Arab leaders," chortled Tucker, "because of course, the capital of Israel is Tel Aviv, isn't it, Bill?" "Yes," came Press's swift, equally erroneous, reply. "And I think it just proves that foot-and-mouth disease is not contained in Europe." Indeed; it can even spread to talking heads in Washington, D.C.

... LAURELS


HOME DISPROVEMENTS

 Long before Bill Clinton picked a Harlem office building as the place to hang his post-presidential hat, real estate in that historic New York neighborhood was attracting press attention of an entirely different kind. In a front-page story on November 26, *The New York Times* reported on three investigations currently under way into a scheme in which speculators allegedly exploited a federal program designed to encourage affordable homeownership in the nation's inner cities. And, as the *Times* noted diligently, the scam had been exposed more than a year earlier by *City Limits*, a 4,000-circulation magazine that focuses on New York urban affairs. Indeed, from "The Harlem Shuffle" in November 1999 to "Empty Promises" (January 2001) and "Loan Injustice" (February 2001, following the indictments), contributing editor Kemba Johnson exhaustively deconstructed, brick by brick, nail by nail, and realtor by lender by appraiser, the whole shaky house of cards. Taking advantage of an FHA program (banned to for-profit investors) that combines purchase and rehab loans in one insured mortgage package, predatory speculators bought up for peanuts hundreds of dilapidated turn-of-the-century brownstones, "flipping" them to nonprofit groups (some of them fronts) at jacked-up prices and leaving "spectacular wreckage" in their wake: a string of uninhabitable houses, unaffordable mortgages, suddenly homeless tenants, unpaid suppliers and workers, and tens of millions of dollars in defaults. In a recent editorial about the local scandal and the too many others like it in other cities, *City Limits* editor Alyssa Katz hammered away at the need for tougher government oversight, particularly of the banks.

TELLING TALES


 The thing about "Ten Things," a standing feature in *Smart Money* magazine, is that it really does smarten up its readers about the things they spend their money on — and it does it in a smart and snappy way. Take, for instance, prescription drugs: among the "Ten Things Your Pharmacist Won't Tell You," *Smart Money* says, is that "your medication is stale" and "I count on kickbacks." What your restaurant is loath to reveal is that "your meal came in the mail" — and by the way, "we may have a different definition of 'vegetarian.'" Your online broker would rather you didn't know that "our computers are often down . . . and you'll never reach us on the phone." The list goes on: antiques dealers, headhunters, hospitals, private schools — every enterprise has its dirty little secrets, and *Smart Money* has made it its business to air them, elaborating on each such disclosure with real-life particulars. Hasty generalization notwithstanding, *Smart Money's* "ten things" add up to a more informed, sophisticated public.

MINING THE FACTS

 The distinction of producing — and exporting — the dirtiest air in the nation belongs to the great state of Ohio, home to twenty-five coal-burning power plants and shortsighted resistance fighter in the thirty-year war against the Clean Air Act of 1970. The battles and the casualties of that still-raging war were dramatically illuminated by the *Akron Beacon Journal* in early January. Written by investigative reporters Margaret Newkirk and Bob Downing, the four-part series, "Power to Pollute," drew on hundreds of interviews with experts on both sides of the environmental issue, thousands of documents from the Justice Department, the EPA, the

state's Public Utilities Commission, the governor's office, and — last but not least — campaign finance records. Naming the high-powered names and disclosing the dirty deals, charting the illegal emissions and describing the callous deceptions, confronting the avoidable loss of miners' jobs and the problematic effect of trading pollution credits — after all those depressing figures and facts, Newkirk and Downing ended nonetheless on an optimistic note that, in the light of later developments, can be read only as ironic. In a January 10 sidebar listing the many factors that could lead to tighter pollution laws, the reporters included incoming president George W. Bush.

THERAPEUTIC JOURNALISM

 Finally, after too many years of the press's superficial, though sympathetic, coverage of AIDS — the appalling descriptions, the ghastly predictions, the incomprehensible inertia of the powers that be — an article has come along that pushes the issue to a deeper level, one impossible to ignore. "How to Solve the World's AIDS Crisis," the 7,500-word cover story by the *New York Times* editorialist Tina Rosenberg in the January 28 Sunday magazine, examines the improbable success experienced by Brazil in containing the spread of the deadly virus through a combination of prevention, education, and state-of-the-art drug therapies produced in generic form at minimal cost. Stripping from the public face of the pharmaceutical companies the protective gauze of patent law and a "one planet, one price" strategy — a strategy which, with the help of donation-hungry politicians in Washington, has kept the therapies unconscionably beyond the reach of millions — Rosenberg describes the loopholes through which other poor countries might legally follow Brazil's inspired example.

The Darts & Laurels column is written by Gloria Cooper, CJR's managing editor, to whom nominations should be addressed.

TERMS OF ENGAGEMENT

How Involved Was Bush in the China Spy-Plane Crisis? Just Ask His Aides

BY CHRISTOPHER HANSON

There was a time when journalists were expected to report as fact only what they could verify empirically, and to leave assertions based purely on faith to the theologians. No longer. Consider news coverage of George W. Bush during the recent flap over detention of the crew of a U.S. Navy spy plane in China. Once the crew was released, a spate of minute-by-minute behind-the-scenes retrospectives on White House decision-making projected Bush as a man firmly in command during the crisis. Curiously, the journalists writing these "tick tocks" had little, if any, independently verifiable data to substantiate the story line, which ran contrary to a widespread impression of Bush as disengaged. Instead, they relied mainly on Bush aides as sources. In other words, their reports amounted to an expression of faith that the propaganda line being spun by the White House somehow coincided with the truth.

Reporters who took the bait on the China plane crisis — and not all did — may have gotten hooked partly out of frustration. Bush has eschewed vigorous grilling by reporters. His administration has suffered few unauthorized leaks. But the "tick tock" is a perfect setup for the authorized leak — the type intended to project an administration as decisive, wise, and in control and to offset a president's perceived liabilities.

Take first the line that Bush played a direct, energetic, and detailed role in the resolution of the spy plane predicament. *The Washington Post* ran with this version more boldly than most. On April 12, it published a twenty-six-paragraph, front-page "analysis" piece headlined BEHIND SCENES, BUSH PLAYED VIGOROUS ROLE, accompanied by a color photo of a con-

cerned, serious-looking Bush, the official seal of the White House behind him, the American flag at his side.

Now consider the less than overwhelming evidence the *Post* marshaled to back up its headline. The article began with an Oval Office anecdote, written with the omniscient, you-are-there perspective that "tick tocks" demand. Bush, we are told by anonymous officials, was on the phone with his military attaché in China and "peppered" him with questions about the crew. According to the article, his questions included: "How's their health? . . . Are they staying in the equivalent of officers' quarters? . . . Are they getting any exercise?" These are fair questions — the sort that a beginning journalism student might think to ask in a classroom exercise — but not in themselves evidence that Bush was vigorously or even semi-vigorously engaged in the crisis. They only indicate a certain degree of alertness.

Then came the Bibles. According to anonymous White House officials quoted in the article, Bush, a devout Christian, asked the attaché if the captives had their own copies of the Good Book. (An April 13 Reuters piece amplified on the



BY JAMES A. PARCELL—THE WASHINGTON POST
Advisers say President Bush, announcing China's decision, asked detailed questions.

The Washington Post, April 12

Bible question. It quoted Bush aide Karen Hughes: "He's very curious, and so he asked a lot of questions . . . He asked some detailed questions. Several times he asked do the members of the crew have Bibles. Why don't they have Bibles? Can we get them Bibles? Would they like Bibles?" Assuming the sources are accurate, it is probably fair to say that Bush displayed vigorous engagement on the

THE WASHINGTON POST/JAMES A. PARCELL

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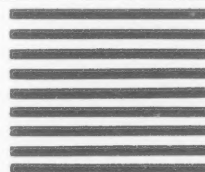
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Good Book front. But since the crew's release was the paramount issue, Bush's Bible queries cannot be said to show he was vigorously engaged across the board.

The *Post* article, again citing unnamed officials, reported that Bush "grilled" national security adviser Condoleezza Rice on how much remorse the United States would express because its damaged plane made an emergency landing without permission and a Chinese pilot died when his fighter and the American plane collided. Bush, the *Post* reported, insisted on changes to keep a letter to Beijing within the "redlines" he set for negotiators." If Bush indeed insisted on substantive changes, this would be evidence of vigorous engagement. But what specific changes did Bush insist on and were they substantive? On this question the *Post* and its anonymous sources were altogether mute, which might give us reason for skepticism. So might the Reuters dispatch, describing composition of the statement: "A senior official said the letter was a combined effort by aides . . . The official said it was Bush's decision to use the word 'regret' in describing the U.S. reaction to the loss of the Chinese fighter pilot. His aides decided to take it a step beyond to 'sorry' in a late-night session between 1 and 2 A.M. Sunday, the official said. Bush authorized it." This version makes it sound as if aides were leading Bush, rather than the other way around.

The issue of Bush's level of engagement might only be resolved if and when reporters get access to verbatim transcripts of confidential meetings in the years to come. What can fairly be said today is that the *Post* did not have enough evidence to justify the impression of an active, engaged Bush that it created with its A-1 headline, photo, and lead anecdote.

Meanwhile, other news outlets embraced a second story line — that Bush set negotiating policy in the crisis and the climate for resolution, leaving the details to others like any good c.e.o. should. The *Los Angeles Times*, for instance, led off its 1,029-word April 13 news analysis this

way: "BUSH GETS HIGH MARKS FOR LOW-KEY APPROACH . . . President Bush's handling of his first foreign policy challenge contrasted sharply with the style of his recent predecessors, but served him very well and may have fixed the character of his tenure . . . (H)e set a tone that gave Beijing the chance to end the dispute gracefully while leaving the tough negotiations to aides." Unfortunately, the piece falls short of resolving whether Bush set the tone or whether senior aides did. In fact, the article eventually contradicts its own lead by quoting a foreign policy analyst suggesting that Rice and Secretary of State Colin Powell, not Bush, gained "the upper hand" in tone-setting.

Other news organizations incongruously combined the two story lines, leading with material that made Bush seem to be a hands-on detail man, then falling back on the idea that he was a hands-off man who set policy and delegated wisely. This coverage was confusing and might suggest that Bush administration leakers did not quite have their story straight. Even so, the coverage no doubt made the White House happy because the two faces of Bush were both positive. The April 13 Reuters dispatch, for example, opened by quoting "aides" saying Bush was "intimately involved." After quoting Hughes on much of the same Bush Does Details material as the *Post*, Reuters then reported that Bush "did not appear to get deeply involved in the nitty-gritty details"! The same dispatch described Bush briefing foreign leaders on the crisis and being, in the words of one unnamed official, "measured and steady."

Time magazine led an April 20 piece with an account of how Bush, having just learned that the crew was to be released, bustled over to the Oval Office at 6:15 A.M., concentrating on "the logistics of getting the crew home . . . What would be the flight path? How long would the crew be on the ground?" (One can't help wondering how *Time* managed to gain access to his interior thoughts.) But before long, the article transformed Bush

from a man of detail into a delegator ("Powell laid down and enforced the President's guidelines . . .") but failed to show that Bush had created those policy guidelines in the first place.

There is an Alice-in-Wonderland logic in the *Time* report. In its opening section, *Time* pictures Bush as a take-charge guy very much on top of things but delegating intelligently to the right people. Then come a few sentences in which the magazine acknowledges that Bush's team was orchestrating events to produce a "projected image: Bush at the helm but smartly hands-off, setting the tone but letting his team of professionals do their job." Then the article goes back to depicting Bush as an engaged, wise delegator. It presents this version as verified reality even though the main sources for the piece are presumably the very administration insiders *Time* admits want to "stage-manage" coverage for p.r. purposes.

In its own weird way, the *Time* article points up a dilemma inherent in nearly all "tick-tocks." On what passes for the plus side, they supposedly bring you inside the room where dramatic decisions are made, and make you see the colors, smell the smells, feel the tension. The tidbits served to *Time*, for instance, included a revelation that, at the moment the charter plane carrying the released Americans touched down in Hawaii, Bush was lunching with Vice President Dick Cheney — "the Veep eating salad, Bush a taco." But, sadly enough, such articles are too often the result of an unspoken, almost Faustian arrangement. Official sources provide the essential inside details and reporters then regurgitate the official line, giving up their independence and skepticism for a taco and a salad and a Bible, along with a quotation from the Boss that he might or might not actually have said.

Rough draft of history, indeed. ■

CJR contributing editor Christopher Hanson, a print journalist for twenty years, teaches journalism at the University of Maryland.

THE *POST* DID NOT HAVE ENOUGH EVIDENCE TO JUSTIFY THE IMPRESSION OF AN ACTIVE, ENGAGED BUSH THAT IT CREATED WITH ITS A-1 HEADLINE, PHOTO, AND LEAD ANECDOTE

After almost a decade of smooth sailing, media company profits plummeted this spring as a rapidly declining stock market spurred a broad downturn. Starting in Silicon Valley and then spreading across the country, executives began to talk about hard choices to maintain profitability, including potential layoffs and other cutbacks affecting editorial content. At one newspaper, the San Jose Mercury News, publisher Jay

Harris stunned the media world by resigning rather than agreeing to cuts that he believed would damage the paper's journalism. Harris quickly came to symbolize journalistic concern over Wall Street's relentless profit pressure. This special report focuses on the Harris resignation and the discussion it sparked about the impact of the current downturn and about the tension between profit margins and journalistic mission.

PROFIT PRESSURES

A Question of Margins

BY DAVID LAVENTHOL

America's newspaper editors were strangely silent, slightly uneasy as Jay Harris prepared to speak at their Washington convention's farewell luncheon in early April. It was almost as though they were about to taste forbidden fruit: one of their own had resigned rather than cut the news budget. And he was going to talk in public about it.

Would he name names? Would Knight Ridder editors join the expected standing ovation? His resignation had reverberated through the newspaper community. What would he do next?

Harris had to be conscious too of the moment and its irony. Three weeks earlier, he had been the publisher of one of the nation's most successful dailies, the Knight Ridder-owned *San Jose Mercury News*; just named to the Pulitzer Prize board; and one of the media's ranking African-Americans. All that wouldn't have earned him a spot as luncheon speaker at ASNE a day after President Bush stood at the same podium.

But quitting did.

So here he was, "honored" to speak to



Jay Harris: 'At the symbolic center'

his peers, knowing that many had faced similar situations, and had chosen to stay and fight. ("It's much easier to rock the boat when you're not in it," a friend had told him.) He described to the group how

he made the decision to quit the night after a particularly difficult budget meeting:

"I woke up Saturday morning, about 3 A.M. I had a knot in my stomach and was deeply troubled. While I was asleep the stark reality of what had happened and what seemed to lie inevitably ahead had worked its way to the front of my brain . . . Resigning was the only way to slow things down."

So he did, and he now found himself "at the symbolic center" of a debate over the soul of the American newspaper. He framed that debate with these questions: "When the interests of readers and shareholders are at odds, which takes priority? When the interests of the community and shareholders are at odds, which takes priority? When the interest of the nation in an informed citizenry and the demands of the shareholders for ever-increasing profits are at odds, which takes priority?"

Harris was passionate and thoughtful. He didn't name names. And when his speech was over, Knight Ridder editors did join the standing ovation.

But stepping back from the drama of the moment, the big question remained: Would the resignation make any differ-

LEO SCHEL

ence? The way of life, particularly of public companies, is pretty well defined. Harris himself quoted one stock analyst on the upward limits of the profit margin: "Never enough. This is Wall Street we're talking about."

Nonetheless, there is an argument to be made. It centers around the presumption that newspapers are different; that in providing news and information to the general public they are essential to a democratic society and that their journalistic work shouldn't rise or fall with the cyclicity of the financial markets.

Cyclicity and its consequences have been at work again this spring. Newspaper revenues have been in double-digit decline. Silicon Valley, the heartland of the boom, is in the middle of the bust. And it is not just Knight Ridder. Even *The New York Times* and Dow Jones have announced cutbacks. If you were running a business and all of a sudden your ability to meet your payroll was threatened, of course you would look at costs.

So I am sure many decision-makers will shrug at Jay Harris's issues and suggest discussing them at a quieter time.

Unfortunately, there never will be a better time. You may have heard the Supreme Court adage: it is frequently a bad case that makes important law, because cases aren't served up like law school exams. You take what comes along. The same is true in this situation. There never is a good time to reconsider profitability strategies, particularly when revenues are oozing away. But this is when Jay Harris resigned. And this is when decisions are being made. And in most instances, cutbacks are being made not to meet payroll, not to pay debt service, not to purchase needed new equipment, but to meet Wall Street's relentless pressure. It is a question of margins.

Let's assume some complexities. Jay Harris has become a symbol, but he notes that resigning was his way; he is not suggesting it should be others' way. This isn't a battle of good vs. evil: all business executives aren't money-grubbing beasts; all journalists aren't unbiased idealists as careful with the company's money as they are with their sources. Reviewing staff effectiveness at any time is valuable. Yet these complexities don't void the issue. So what can be done? Here are eight suggestions:

■ First and most importantly, editorial budgets should not routinely be cut in a

HARD NUMBERS

Newspaper Industry Average Operating Margins

1990

14.8 %

2000

21.5 %

More Hard Numbers on page 23

weak economy. Newspaper owners should recognize that they are able to make money because their publications are fulfilling a public need. This obligation doesn't vanish when the economy erodes; if anything it is more important in hard times. Cutting back is the wrong message, not to journalists but to readers, who don't need more reasons not to buy a newspaper. If we are beyond "routine" and cuts must take place, the editor should be intimately involved — and should have a voice in the outcome.

■ Second, publicly held news companies should find ways to adjust their profit margins to the realities of the business they are in. Margins have been in the 20s and creeping up until recently and that is just not consistent with an industry that has to struggle to capture ad dollars, is facing an eroding readership, and has unmet journalistic needs. Wall Street will always push for a bigger number, but when the long-term health of the enterprise is threatened, some investors will turn to other businesses anyway.

■ Third, Wall Street should be exposed to this kind of strategy. The markets will set their own rules, but so can the media companies. The regular gatherings of media companies and financial analysts should include emphasis on editorial performance. Quality news coverage should be presented as a core cost of doing business, and could serve as a benchmark for stock pricing as the key to the long-term health of the company.

■ Fourth, what we have here is a failure to communicate, to use the old movie line. Business-side people, specifically executives, should get to know and understand newsrooms and news people, particularly about why the numbers aren't the best way to measure journalistic success. And news people should not only be required to understand how the business works financially; they should

understand how the newsroom itself allocates and spends its money. There remains a sense of entitlement among journalists that increases natural tensions. Financial understanding might ease those somewhat.

■ Fifth, newspaper companies should report on themselves, warts and all. This would be painful but helpful. If readers understood newspaper economics, they could be powerful allies in offering support for new philosophies of profitability.

■ Sixth, start-up procedures for new ventures should include an orderly plan for what happens to the people involved if the venture fails. Risk should be balanced by reward for good performance even if projects don't turn out to be successful.

■ Seventh, for the longer term, publicly held newspaper companies that are concerned about journalism could consider alternative forms of ownership, including going private (although there is no assurance there; most of the best newspapers are public), multiple classes of stock, and spinoffs. More radical steps, such as Nelson Poynter's willing the *St. Petersburg Times* to an educational institution, are less likely. But look backward. Forty years ago almost no newspaper was publicly owned. Change can take place.

■ Eighth, company boards and key executive groups could include some representation from editors. Symbolically and practically, their being at the table can add something.

Was Jay Harris right to resign? Will the waters close over the issues he has raised? No one is proposing to change the free-market economy, but this is a unique moment where some tough issues have been raised. They shouldn't be brushed aside. The boat should keep rocking. ■

David Laventhol, publisher and editorial director of CJR, was publisher of the Los Angeles Times during the last recession.

'When the interests of readers and shareholders are at odds, which takes priority?'

In Their Own Words

The Harris Resignation

Steve Rossi

Rossi is the recently named president of the Knight Ridder newspaper division and a fifteen-year business executive at the company. Following a budget meeting earlier that Friday, March 16, Rossi sent an e-mail memorandum to the Mercury News's publisher, Jay Harris, raising a number of issues and asking him to respond by Monday noon. Here are some excerpts:

CONTENTS: I would recommend taking a hard look at the recent reader research. If the Mercury News's market is similar to our other markets, the research will indicate that readers want more local news. The Mercury News front pages are consistently local and compelling, while the inside of the A section is very heavily weighted toward foreign news. This may be something to reconsider. Readers want tighter editing, and they want relevance. They want to know why the story is important to them, and they want to see clear utility.

PROFITABILITY: The key thoughts to keep in mind here are that the margins of the Mercury News have ranged between 22 percent and 29 percent over the past 10 years, largely dependent upon the strength of employment advertising. We need to move that range up in order to be in step with the goal to move KR's overall margins up. The Mercury News' controllable margins (revenue less operating expenses excluding newsprint) have slipped down over the past few years.

Jay Harris

Here are excerpts from Harris's March 19 reply to Rossi and to Tony Ridder, Knight Ridder's c.e.o.

Steve asked to review my thoughts on how to proceed at the Mercury News in light of the current economic downturn. I will share them in this memo.

I also use this letter to submit my resignation as chairman and publisher of the Mercury News.

I do so with deep regret.

But I resign in the hope that doing so will cause you to closely examine the wisdom of the parameters for 2001 profit. Steve gave the Mercury News senior executive team in our meeting Friday. Meeting the goal will necessitate deep and ill-advised staff and expense reductions at the Mercury News.

■ The profit target Steve laid out on Friday cannot be achieved short of layoffs. I recommend, therefore, that a lower target be



Tony Ridder

established given the mutual desire to avoid layoffs.

■ Given the substantial number of our readers, and residents of our community, who were born in other nations, the equally significant number employed by global businesses, and the many readers for whom such news is a priority, I would recommend that the weighting is proper and should not be changed.

■ Steve told me that Tony has approved a change in the long-standing guideline that Knight Ridder newspapers return to their communities one percent of their annual operating profit. I recommend against this.

■ More important than anything else, I recommend that you take greater time and the appropriate care with the appropriate decisions ahead. Particularly important are those decisions that will affect the quality and reputation of the newspaper.

Tony Ridder

Late Monday, March 19, a memorandum to the staff was issued by Tony Ridder (and three other Knight Ridder executives).

This is a sad and difficult time for all of us. We are deeply sorry about Jay's resignation. It came as a surprise. We asked him to reconsider, but he would not.

We want to tell you about our meeting with Jay and his top managers on Friday. The meeting was attended by Steve Rossi, president of the newspaper division, Jerry Ceppos, vice president for news, Mary Jean Connors, senior vice president for human resources, and Garry Effren, vice president and controller of Knight Ridder. While the meeting was tough and candid, Steve made clear that he wanted no layoffs of full-time newsroom employees and hoped to avoid layoffs of full-time employees elsewhere in the building. He conceded that this might mean restructuring in some business-side departments but stressed that he, like Jay, did not want to damage the long-term future of the Mercury News. We think it is important that you know that.

Jay Harris

Harris was the closing speaker on Friday, April 8, at the American Society of Newspaper Editors convention in Washington. Excerpts:

It was the conviction that newspapers are a public trust that brought me to Knight Ridder in 1985.

I understood then and understand even better today that

a good newspaper and a good business go hand in hand. Indeed, without a good business it would be impossible for a newspaper to do good journalism over the long haul.

But at some point one comes to ask what is meant by a good business? What is good enough in terms of profitability and sustained year-to-year profit improvement? And how do you balance maintaining a strong business with your responsibilities as the steward of a public trust? Maybe that is the most important question because our business — if you approach it as a public trust as well as a business — is different from most businesses.

Most businesses can reduce expenses more or less proportionately with demand and revenue without doing irreparable damage to their core capabilities, their market position or their mission. Manufacturing businesses are a good example. When fewer items are bought fewer items need to be made and lay-offs in various areas are possible. But news and readers' interests do not contract with declining advertising. Nor does our responsibility to the public get smaller as revenue declines or newsprint becomes more expensive. That is where the balancing act comes in. That is where the character of leaders comes in and the priorities they set.

A publisher wrote me this week to say he respected my decision to resign and hoped I would respect his decision to stay in the job and put out the best paper he could for his community. And that newspaper is still quite good.

Not only do I respect his decision, I know it is the right one if we are to set the balance right again.

We need people like that publisher working on the inside to support good journalism and build healthy businesses. Great institutions fail when they are overcome by a corrupting ideal or when the good people who sustain them lose faith and leave.

I made the choice to work from the outside. As Nancy Woodhull, a friend and talented editor who died too soon used to say, "It is much easier to rock the boat when you're not in it."

Tony Ridder

Excerpt from April 6 column in Mercury News:

I was as surprised by Jay Harris's resignation as anyone reading this column. I learned of it a few minutes after he announced it to the *Mercury News* staff via e-mail. He came to the Knight Ridder office, stayed only a few minutes and made clear that he did not wish to discuss the issue with anyone on the corporate staff — including me. That, too, was surprising; I was in my office at the time. To this day I still haven't heard from him.

I have known Jay well, and worked closely with him, for more than twelve years. In late 1988 he came to Miami from the *Philadelphia Daily News*, where he had been executive editor. I had picked him to be my assistant. In early 1994, when the *Mercury News*' publisher's spot opened up, I was more than pleased to be able to appoint someone of Jay's caliber.

Now here we are seven years later. It has ended badly, and I probably will never know everything that went wrong. But this I do know: Times are a lot harder in 2001 in the newspaper industry (actually, in all media supported by advertising), than they have been for a long time. And they are especially hard in the nation's high-tech heartland.

Nobody knows how long a downturn will last. Nor, in the early stages, how severe it will be. So you trim the sails to be ready for whatever rough weather may come your way.

While I find all of this distressing on many levels, the worst of it — by far — is the hurt I perceive to two of the entities I love most in this world: the *San Jose Mercury News* and the community it serves.

I was privileged to participate in some of the important events that helped to shape the San Jose we have today. That I might participate in permitting a cyclical downturn in the economy to damage them is unthinkable. ■



Widening The Conversation

Geneva Overholser

On a July morning three years ago, I sat in Jay Harris's office at the *San Jose Mercury News* and told him a story that Gene Patterson had told me. It was about John S. "Jack" Knight, and an encounter he had years ago with Nelson Poynter, then owner of the *St. Petersburg Times*. "Jack saw Nelson at a Gridiron dinner in Washington. They were in the men's room, standing at the urinals. And Jack leaned down to Nelson, who was a diminutive guy, and he said, 'I've got an announcement coming up next week and I wonder what you think of it.' Nelson said, 'Well, what is that?' And Jack said, 'I'm

Geneva Overholser (genevaoh@aol.com), a syndicated columnist for The Washington Post Writers Group, writes regularly for CJR about newspapers. Among the positions she has held are editorial writer for The New York Times, editor of The Des Moines Register, and ombudsman for The Washington Post. She also served nine years on the Pulitzer Prize board.

taking Knight Newspapers public. Whaddya think about that, Nelson?" And quick as a shot Nelson replied, 'Jack, I think it'll be just fine — as long as you're alive.'"

Jay chuckled about the anecdote I'd offered up, but he responded, "There's no point lamenting the reality of what happened thirty years ago." Then he added: "Increased profitability and improved journalism and public service are not by definition mutually exclusive — although there are ways that you can get to increased profitability that make them mutually exclusive."

A few weeks ago, Harris apparently ran up against some of those ways — and resigned. When I got the word, I thought: This could do for the profits-over-journalism dilemma what Staples Center did for blurring between news and advertising — bring it at last to the forefront of discussion. So many people have resigned over the years in frustration; so few spoke out at the time. There are always good reasons. For example, when you speak out, you make things difficult for people you care about.

In 1990, I gave a speech at Gannett's corporate meeting suggesting that this company, which had proven its boldness with the launch of *USA Today* and its imaginativeness

Harris 'has brought a long-festering truth to the forefront'

through its leading role in hiring women and minorities, might also lead the industry in proving that public companies can do well by employees, readers and communities even as they, necessarily, do well by shareholders. You'd have thought I'd screamed obscenities. My publisher, Charles Edwards, took the flak.

It was also in 1990 that Gene Roberts resigned as editor of *The Philadelphia Inquirer*. I called to plead that he would go public with what I knew to be his passionate concern about profit pressures. He said he wanted to avoid poisoning the well for his successor.

When people do speak out, others look for motives that sap the power of it. This editor had presumed too much, that one was a hothead, another had personal issues. Most editors just stick to the job. Partly that's because the money is awfully good these days and tightly tied to the financial performance of the company (as Jay put it in his ASNE speech, those golden parachutes can become golden handcuffs and blindfolds as well). But the main thing is that everyone has high hopes, and there are always some victories, and journalism is engaging work.

What Jay Harris stood before a ballroom full of news executives at ASNE and told us, in a strong and steady tone, is that we have been accommodating ourselves to the unacceptable. He showed us how our collaboration has permitted the construction of a system in which serving the market trumps serving democracy, and profits matter more than anything else.

It's a slow and silent surrender. There are those who will focus on the generous investments made in the *Mercury News* and those who will speculate about hidden meanings or sympathize with Knight Ridder executives. But the point that Jay's resignation made is far larger. He has brought a long-festering truth to the forefront of our consciences, and most of the people in that room — where nary a cough was heard and people seemed hardly to be breathing — knew it.

So what should we do? For one thing, conduct research that can put meat on the bones of the longtime lamentations. Stephen Lacy, a media economist who heads the Michigan State University School of Journalism, is studying the relationship between short-term economic pressures and long-term value. "Preliminary indications are that the higher the margins," he has said, "the higher the loss of circulation in the 1990s." This, if it bears out, will be invaluable information. So would any substantiation of connections between budget cuts and a decline in journalistic excellence. And — especially promising in terms of reaching publishers — connections between the cuts and the criticisms readers have. For example, readers tell us they hate our careless errors, and charge we're likelier now to misspell words and use bad grammar. Well, copy desks have typically taken on most of the work of composing rooms, and few that I know of have staffed up anywhere near sufficiently in response: these staffing conversions were too tempting a gold mine for hard-pressed newspapers. Little wonder that people putting the newspaper together have less time to go painstakingly over copy — much less to come up with engaging and accurate display type.

Or, take diversity. Figures released at ASNE show that the

number of minorities in newsrooms has declined slightly, despite increased hiring. The problem is in retention. In looking at why people of color have left newsrooms, it seems likely we'll find dissatisfaction about acceptance and opportunities. But we might well also find unhappiness over pay, given the low level of beginning newspaper salaries.

Also due some examination are the effects of reduced training budgets. Of newshole cuts and reallocations. Of the fact that we cut off (and don't seek) subscribers not of interest to our advertisers. That we reduce our own promotion budgets even as we preach to others about the power of advertising.

We're told that no c.e.o. could possibly stand up to the quarter-to-quarter profit pressures, lest his stock fall and his company be unable to borrow money — or worse, be taken over. But are we sure? The analyst John Morton told "Grade the News," a Bay area media watchdog group (www.gradethenews.org), that "newspapers are such heavy cash flow businesses even in hard times, that they wouldn't be cut off from capital formation — even if their stock price fell." As for takeover, Morton surprisingly said, "Historically, newspaper companies don't launch unfriendly tender offers for another newspaper company. It's too collegial a business for that." Nor do non-newspaper companies show much interest.

We must widen this conversation, then, to talk to business-savvy people about the effect of the short-term pressures and what might be done about them. To thoughtful lawyers about the impact on our First Amendment standing when we are seen as just another commodity. To board members of media companies to see how they view their responsibility toward journalistic excellence. And, not least, to those who work for newspapers. Whenever I write on these issues, I am swamped by responses.

An editor in the Southwest wrote, "The truth is that in most media companies you can't even engage the corporate bosses in a frank and open discussion. If you have to talk about it, just leave." An editor at a New York Times-owned newspaper says, "We are trying to figure out how to achieve double-digit earnings increases this year without destroying most of what has made us such a powerful force in the community." And a journalist at a Gannett-owned paper cites ombudsman reports that readers ask for "more detail, not less. More national and international news, not less. And more information in general. A couple of them even complained about our fruitless chase for a demographic that doesn't know we're there at the expense of reliable readers who have been buying our product for years." There is so much here to get out to the public — and that, in the end, is the real audience. For it's their right to know that is abridged when shareholder interests dominate.

And who is going to bring all this to the public but us? Jay Harris ended that interview with me three years ago by saying, "It is possible to make a lot of money and do bad journalism and ruin a newspaper. But it's also possible to make a lot of money, build a stronger franchise and do better journalism. It all depends on the people." That remains true. Jack Knight is no longer around. But we are. ■



'It's Going To Get Worse'

Frank A. Blethen

Public-company ownership and concentration of ownership are incompatible with a newspaper's public service stewardship. Combine the two and our ability to invest in original news content and long-term reader connection is severely limited.

Being publicly traded means your fiduciary responsibility is to maximize profits, which forces you to focus on short-term decision-making. This works against long-term investment decisions and the aggressive development of original, independent local content.

This hasn't always been as clear as it is today.

About twenty-five years ago, we began transitioning from mostly locally owned, private, independent newspapers to what today has become an industry dominated by absentee chain owners and publicly traded companies.

The market and its investors demand annual profit growth. In response, the industry started using profit margins as the Holy Grail to prove we are more profitable than most other industries.

High and increasing margins became essential to try to interest institutional investors who viewed us as a staid, mature industry and a dull investment. Especially compared to the glitter and promise of the tech and dot-com world.

In the early stages of this transition we knew the first generation of people who began building the public newspaper companies and laying the foundation for today's concentration of ownership. They were experienced newspaper operators, often with news backgrounds. For the most part, they had respect for quality, local journalism, and our public-service stewardship.

But as time passed, the market's short-term profit demands continued and ownership concentration increased. We moved into a new generation of chain newspaper leaders. Frequently, today's chains and public company leaders are business-side, corporate people whose priority must be keeping their institutional investors and the stock market happy. My personal epiphany occurred in the early '90s when I realized the industry had replaced important words like "communities" and "newspapers" with new words like "markets" and "properties."

Perhaps public ownership by itself wouldn't be as harmful if it weren't for the rapid increase in ownership concentration. But there is simply no way a large, faceless, institutional investor is going to spend time worrying about readers, content, and the quality of our journalism.

Today the negative consequences of public newspaper ownership combined with media ownership concentration has become clear. Most alarming is that it is going to get worse. Our nation's newspaper and journalistic voices are less diverse, independent, and bold than ever before. Democracy and public service are not well served by this trend.

The wonderful journalists populating our newsrooms today are fighting the good fight. But it's a losing battle against a relentless market. Only radical action can stem the tide. Serious limitations should be put on ownership concentration of newspapers and other media. And tax laws that drive privately held newspapers into public-chain hands need to be changed. Anything short of this and the next twenty-five years will be a sad period for the news business and for our country.

Frank Blethen is majority owner, publisher, and c.e.o. of The Seattle Times. He has been one of the leaders in an effort to eliminate the estate tax.

OTHER VOICES

Peter C. Goldmark, Jr. (Publisher, *International Herald Tribune*). The dilemma of balancing journalistic imperatives with financial requirements resists all formulaic approaches. Not every newshole cut is an assault on quality journalism; not every increase in editorial staffing reduces the profit margin. The danger of these and other input-based dipstick tests is that one can assign theological significance to what is so easily measured and shy away from the tougher job of judging the quality, force, and relevance of the journalism in the case at issue.

The *San Jose Mercury News* is one of America's great papers. I trust it will remain such. But I salute Jay Harris for drawing the line between profit and good journalism where he thought it had to be drawn — for his paper, in that community, at this moment. I served many years in public life and there came one or two moments when I had to tell a governor that it was his right to do what he intended to do, but that he would have to pick up my badge at the door and do it without me. There are few lonelier moments in a professional life.

I also served on the Knight Ridder board, and I've seen the company limit margins in the name of sound journalism. That's a tough road; sometimes it's the only road.

Pam Johnson (Poynter Institute). Jay Harris's bold action opened up important discussions in all corners of our industry. In newsrooms, we feed our journalistic passion through each other's experiences. But we haven't been strong vocal missionaries to spread that passion outside our doors. Our voices and our advocacy on behalf of journalism may never be more important than they are now.

One great story to tell involves progress we've made that influences the quality of journalism. We've committed to basics that emphasize accuracy, credibility, and connections with our communities. We are creating new pathways to diversity. We are expanding our journalism beyond newspapers. We know more about our readers, our communities, and our relationships with them than ever before. We are the best sources of information across the country.

We also have a great story about what distinguishes us from other businesses. Newspapers are unique, presenting a whole new picture of the world each day. Newspapers are vital to creating that shared understanding every day and over time. We must help our companies quantify this commitment better than we have in the past.



After publisher Harris quit in hopes of prompting Knight Ridder to rethink profit goals, *Mercury News* staffers briefly walked out

Whiplash

What High Margins Mean in the Trenches

BY ARIEL HART

Knight Ridder isn't alone in taking measures against a current and expected revenue crunch, but it garnered headlines with aggressive profit goals and drama at the top. And as the media world ponders profits and public trust in the wake of the Jay Harris resignation, journalists from the chain are feeling the pain. Here are some voices from the other end of a sharp pencil:

Mike Jacobs, editor of the *Grand Forks Herald*, led the North Dakota daily's Pulitzer Prize-winning coverage of the 1997 floods that wiped out his city. During the four months after the flood, Knight Ridder sent in sixty loaners from other papers, and didn't blink at rebuilding the *Herald's* newsroom, which had burned down. This March, though, it demanded a revenue margin high enough to require cuts. To achieve that margin, Jacobs froze three open positions and laid off three veteran journalists from an editorial staff of thirty-nine. "It is extremely difficult to sit down next to someone you know and

tell them . . ." His voice fades. "We miss them. They are our friends."

It takes time, meanwhile, to learn to work with fewer resources. When key census data came out midweek early in April, for example, the *Herald* was all over it. But no one picked up the slack elsewhere. "You get here and your weekend budget is full of holes," says Jacobs. "It hurts when you have a staff that for many years has put together surprisingly good coverage seven days a week, and now you have to make compromises you wouldn't have made earlier."

Jacobs, who calls himself "a Knight Ridder loyalist," says the paper will pull through. "I pride myself in being a good editor. I'm trying to be a good businessman."

Last summer, the *Grand Forks Herald* asked Jaime DeLage to return to its reporting staff. His job installing solar electric systems wasn't paying the bills, so he was happy to take up his notebook again. "At the time it felt like, boy, there's opportunities everywhere," he says. "Shortly after that we heard whispers of impending layoffs."

The *Herald* is not a guild paper, so everyone's job was on the table. DeLage

covers the legislature solo from Bismarck, and he knows that position is vulnerable. The anxiety lingers, and he and his colleagues take care to be productive. "It was certainly an incentive to produce bylines if nothing else," he says. But that precludes taking the time to sniff out larger projects. "Trolling is hard to do," he says, "when you're pumping out stories every day."

Rick Tulskey is relatively new to the *San Jose Mercury News* — he got there in August — but he isn't new to the tension that comes with cost cuts. The investigative reporter was at *The Philadelphia Inquirer* when profit pressures hit in the early 1990s. "It made it, in the end, not the special place it had been," he says. Tulskey's time at the *Los Angeles Times* coincided with Mark Willes's tumultuous reign as the Cereal Killer. From Tulskey's perspective, the low morale spawned by cuts is tough to shake. "It takes until the next really great story," he says. The only problem is that the budget that makes a newsroom need that story also makes the story harder to get. "To the degree those corners are cut," Tulskey says, "we'll never know what stories we didn't find."

Mercury News Publisher Jay Harris resigns

Jay Harris announced his resignation to leave the Mercury News after seven years as publisher. He said he was going to return to the Valley and was looking forward to a brief period of freedom and relaxation.



SAYS CUTS COULD HARM PAPER, COMMUNITY

By Brandon Bailey and John Roudsari

Jay T. Harris resigned Monday as publisher of the Mercury News, saying he feared that corporate budget and staffing cuts would harm the newspaper and the community it serves. Citing the prospect of layoffs, proposed changes to news coverage and possible cuts to the paper's E-group, Harris said in his letter of resignation that he feared the corporation was playing too much corporate

as an economic concern at the expense of the newspaper's role as a public trust. Top executives of the newspaper's corporate parent, San Jose-based Knight Ridder, offered a contrasting characterization in a letter to Mercury News employees. They said the company still hopes to avoid layoffs and promised that "we will not let the capriciousness of Silicon Valley damage the newspaper that we are so proud of."

—HARRIS Page 14

Although the Akron Beacon Journal cut eight newsroom people, its Sunday magazine, and opinion page, Bob Dyer, a feature writer at the paper, says that his plate is full of work he likes. He is still free to pursue good stories. But Dyer isn't pitching them all. Three of his top twelve ideas would now be too expensive, he says. So he sits on them, hoping sources will come to Ohio, or that the pinch will pass and the stories will still be worth writing. A project like "A Question of Color," for which the Beacon Journal funded focus groups, a poll, and multiple reporters — and which won the Pulitzer Prize for Public Service in 1994 — would be "a tougher sell" today.

"For a long time I thought it was a major advantage to work for a public company," he says. "But now I'm having serious second thoughts."

After being laid off from the Beacon Journal in March, Mark Schlueb gained brief Internet fame (or notoriety) for a profane letter to Anthony Ridder. "You faceless corporate hacks take a break from your golf game long enough to scream that circulation must stay up, but then you order arbitrary budget cuts that force the elimination of entire sections of the Sunday paper," he

TOP OF THE HEAD: Philadelphia Inquirer reporter Wendy Ginsberg had a thought



PHILADELPHIA INQUIRER/WME PLUNKETT

Mike McGraw of The Kansas City Star is trying to see both sides of the current crisis. Travel will be limited this year, and a colleague's recent request for a new database was denied. On the other hand, like many Knight Ridder journalists, McGraw owns a chunk of company stock and is not indifferent to its fortunes. "Do I want my stocks to tank and my portfolio to go to hell?" he says. "Of course not." But he doesn't think spectacular stock value is the only way to survive, either. "I would much rather this paper remain a good paper," he says, "than to see my stock perform well."

Thirly Umrigar left her job as the Akron Beacon Journal's health writer in 1999 for a fellowship. The paper helped with the costs of a Nieman class, gender, and race, then assigned her to its Sunday magazine last August. Umrigar put her training to work on profiles that explored social divides, like the different ways that racism had affected three generations of a local black family. "They finally were really making use of me," she says.

By January, though, the magazine was gone, the victim of a series of cuts, and Umrigar was sent back to her health beat. She imagines she'll be pulled from time

wrote. Schlueb, now at the Orlando Sentinel, regrets how his outburst was received. "I just wish people would pay more attention to what Knight Ridder's doing than to the dirty words that I put in my letter," he says.

Schlueb, who left the last family-owned daily in Florida — the News-Journal in Daytona Beach — to go to Akron, says the strong emotions that the layoffs sparked affected reporting at the paper. "You threaten people's jobs and instead of worrying about getting a story done they start worrying about feeding their families," he says. "All the reporters I talked with found themselves much less productive."

In his ten months in Akron, Schlueb uncovered scandals that precipitated a state ethics investigation and helped defeat an incumbent sheriff. He thinks the Beacon-Journal has the tools to do great stories, but he's not so sure about its future. "It will be harder for them to attract the quality of journalists they have become accustomed to," he says.

to time to cover for some of the eight newsroom staff members who were asked to leave in April. "It's paradoxical," she says. "Here I was at Nieman and they had this great series of speakers, three times a week people would come talk about the nobility of journalism. It was so disillusioning to come back to this." ■

Ariel Hart is a writer in Atlanta.

HARD NUMBERS

20.8 percent Knight Ridder's operating margin in 2000

13.6 percent Knight Ridder's operating margin in 1991

31 percent Percentage Knight Ridder's earnings were down this first quarter from the first quarter of 2000

28 percent Gannett's operating margin in 2000

19.7 percent Gannett's operating margin in 1991

21.5 percent E.W. Scripps operating margin in 2000

14.1 percent E.W. Scripps operating margin in 1991

22 percent The amount E.W. Scripps earnings are down in first quarter from its newspaper and television business, as compared to first quarter last year

26.3 percent Dow Jones Print Publication operating margin in 2000

11.1 percent Dow Jones Print Publication operating margin in 1991

81 percent The decrease in Dow Jones's earnings in first quarter as compared to first quarter last year

202 The number of workers laid off by Dow Jones in a cost-cutting move

11 percent Decrease in full-run advertising in February 2001 as compared to February 2000 at the Los Angeles Times

12 percent Decrease in classified ad revenue in February 2001 as compared to February 2000, Tribune Co.

35.5 percent Decrease in advertising volume at The Wall Street Journal in February 2001 as compared to February 2000

\$710/metric ton UBS Warburg's prediction for newsprint price at end of 2002

\$515/metric ton Average 1999 newsprint price (newsprint is 25 to 30 percent of a newspaper's costs)

Sources: John Morton, Morton Research; The New York Times; USA Today; The Associated Press, Inland Press Association

For a running tally of media layoffs, go to www.journalismjobs.com/layoffs.cfm

—Matthew Fogel
Fogel is an intern at CJR.

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THE INVESTIGATORS

We start with our cover girl, Ida Tarbell. Investigative reporting existed before she zeroed in on Standard Oil, but she and her muckraking colleagues reshaped the form. Over the next 100 years many others contributed to its evolution, some of them sprinkled through the following pages in "Role Models" boxes — accomplished current investigators saluting those who inspired them. Here at the turn of another century, Tarbell would be amazed at the breadth and variety of investigative work.

Would she be proud or worried? The duty to monitor power — political, corporate, whatever — for the benefit of the general public is why we get to carry the great shield of the First Amendment. That watchdog role is close to the journalistic heart of the matter. But as Bill Kovach and Tom Rosenstiel point out on page 50, the role is not guaranteed, and in some ways it is threatened. Strikingly, it is threatened in part by inadequate, unfair, or off-target work that echoes the style of investigative reporting but not its core. And as Andrew Kohut observes on page 52, the rise of lurid, personally intrusive journalism undermines the public's belief in the watchdog role. Strong journalists carry on their shoulders the sins of weak and cynical ones.

Can it stay on target? Monica Lewinsky and Wen Ho Lee are receding in our rear view mirrors, but it is difficult to see the future. Who will play the part of Ida Tarbell now, helping to create a kind of journalism that can monitor the new concentrations of power that are coming into existence, just as they were in 1900? Now, when power is going global and the very media companies we work for throw the kind of weight that Standard Oil did then?

How investigative reporting evolves depends partly on the spirit of the time in which it exists and partly on the journalistic institutions that do — or do not — nourish it. But it depends also on the quality of the people who pitch and approve and produce the stories. And here the news is good. Young journalists at the turn of this century can be inspired by the best efforts of Jeff Gerth, as portrayed in Ted Gup's profile on page 32. Or by the documentary filmmaker Robert Richter, plugging away against the odds, profiled by Lauren Janis on page 48. Or by the quality work still being produced on television, explored in Neil Hickey's "TV With Teeth" article on page 42. Or by the voluminous and sometimes heroic work that is being done — day in and day out, often without fanfare — in many newspapers and a few magazines across the

country, as Tracy Barnett and Steve Weinberg describe on page 54. In the first piece in this special section, Florence George Graves points out that what we investigate is linked to who we are. We can't see what's ahead for investigative journalism, but we can look around at the people who produce it now and have a little faith. ■

THE CONNECTION

What We Investigate Is Linked to Who We Are

BY FLORENCE GEORGE GRAVES



I can't remember which one of my stories about Senator Bob Packwood's sexual misconduct prompted Joan Valdina, a savvy octogenarian in my Unitarian Uni-

versalist church, to ask the question that would ignite — maybe “renew” is a better word — an investigation of my own psyche. I don't recall her exact words, but one Sunday after church, instead of offering a pat on the back for breaking the big story, she hollered something like, “I'd love to know what happened to you as a child that caused you to become an investigative reporter!”

What happened to me as a child?

It's hard for investigative reporters to know what really motivates them — their choice of stories, their determination to work day and night to nail down information. But given the sometimes awesome power invested in us to diminish some lives while enhancing others, occasional introspection doesn't seem too much to ask.

Had I repressed — as I feared my neighbor's question suggested — some dark childhood secret? I began torturing myself, almost methodically going through the file cabinet in my memory,

Florence George Graves is a veteran investigative reporter and editor. In 1980 she founded Common Cause Magazine, which won a National Magazine Award for general excellence in 1987. With Charles E. Shepard, she broke the Senator Bob Packwood sexual misconduct story for The Washington Post, which led to his eventual resignation. She is a resident scholar at the Brandeis University Women's Studies Research Center.

dredging up emotional hurts, but nothing too traumatic turned up. If something in fact did “happen” to me, I think it was subtle, a slow realization that things are not always as they seem.

The same kind of thing, apparently, “happened” to other investigative reporters, including some of the best of us, such as Bob Woodward and Katherine Boo, both of *The Washington Post*. Both learned as children that people operate on different levels of reality. Woodward recalls working as a janitor in his father's law office in Wheaton, Illinois, as a high school student in the 1950s when curiosity led him through his father's files. There he discovered some of the best-kept secrets of the town's citizens and realized that “a public world and a secret world” could exist simultaneously. “Vivid” is how he remembers the “disparity,” the “concealment” and “hypocrisy,” he found in those files. Then, much later, while a Navy officer stationed at the Pentagon, he “saw a lot of communications traffic.” The man who voted for Richard Nixon in 1968 began to develop hostility toward the Vietnam war. He began to believe “that something was grievously off the track,” that “the government had misapplied its power.” He was reading *The Washington Post*, liked its “deeply skeptical” sense of inquiry, and began to realize that journalism was one way to help make institutions accountable.

Kate Boo, whose Pulitzer Prize-winning work disclosed neglect and abuse in Washington's group homes for the mentally ill, notes that her mother “grew up poor and smart and proud,” and Boo



Author and daughter: ‘What happened to me as a child?’

was “fascinated” by the way her mother's and her mother's siblings' choices in life were circumscribed by their economic circumstances. “Who knows what's inside us that makes us” choose certain stories, says Boo. But she acknowledges that “there's self-interest” in her focus on “the incredibly powerful stories in the lives of ordinary people.” She says she gets “an enormous amount from the people I write about,” including ideas about how to live a meaningful life.

Does that mean that Woodward and Boo aren't truly “objective” — journalism's supposed Holy Grail? Probably. In this matter I side with Jack Fuller, president of the Tribune Company's publishing operation, who wrote in his

IDA TARBELL, PATRON SAINT

BY STEVE WEINBERG

It does not look like anything especially impressive today. It sits on an out-of-the-way shelf, one of millions of volumes in a cavernous university research library. Its green cover has faded after ninety-seven years of heavy use, occasional abuse and, ultimately, lack of use. It is mentioned in Twentieth Century American history courses on college campuses. But hardly anybody alive has read it from beginning to end, all 815 pages.

That is a shame, because the book is probably the greatest work of investigative journalism ever written. *The History of the Standard Oil Company* is the unprepossessing title. By Ida M. (for Minerva) Tarbell.

Born in 1857 in rural northwestern Pennsylvania, Tarbell was forty-three when she started researching the world's most powerful corporation and its chief executive, John D. Rockefeller. By the time she started, Tarbell had won a measure of fame for her serialized biographies in *McClure's Magazine* on Napoleon Bonaparte and Abraham Lincoln. Finding new material about those historical figures had been difficult, given how much had already been published about them. But a determined, talented Tarbell had succeeded.

Rockefeller presented a different kind of challenge. He was alive, not dead, and at the zenith of his power. He had no intention of letting a mere journalist — and a woman, at that — assault his empire.

Tarbell's biggest obstacle, however, was neither her gender nor Rockefeller's opposition. Rather, her biggest obstacle was the craft of journalism. She proposed to investigate Standard Oil and Rockefeller by using documents — hundreds of thousands of pages scattered throughout the nation — then fleshing out her findings through well-informed interviews with the company's current and former executives, competitors, government regulators, antitrust lawyers, and academic experts.

In other words, Tarbell proposed to practice what today is considered inves-



PAPER TRAIL: To explain Standard Oil, Tarbell reinvented investigative reporting

tigative reporting. But in 1900, as she began her research, investigative reporting did not exist on such a scale. Tarbell would have to reshape the form.

So who was this reporter willing to take on Standard Oil and Rockefeller? Ida Tarbell possessed a relentless curiosity from a young age. The circumstances of her upbringing eventually focused that curiosity on Standard Oil. The first major oil find in the continental United States occurred in northwestern Pennsylvania, just a short ride from Tarbell's birthplace, and just two years after her birth. Like many others in the region, Tarbell's father Franklin did his best to capitalize on the oil boom. He started a tank-building business, given the pressing need for containers to transport the liquid gold.

So Tarbell grew up in the oil culture. She heard her father and his contemporaries talk about the rapacious corporation that Rockefeller had built from scratch. All those decades later, when editor S.S. McClure decided somebody had to explain the tentacles of the gigantic trusts to his magazine's readership, it seemed natural to focus on the biggest trust of all, Standard Oil. It also seemed natural to assign the project to Tarbell.

But it did not seem natural at all for Tarbell to approach the assignment by seeking documents such as transcripts of congressional hearings, court files, probate papers, and land deeds. She invented

the paper-trail school of journalism. Previous exposés in newspapers and magazines had been based largely on a combination of interviewing, gossip, and observations made while undercover. The result — lots of inaccurate journalism that sometimes contained kernels of truth.

Tarbell's new brand of investigative reporting had an impact. Rockefeller, almost universally considered an aggressive but fair businessman and a devout Christian practicing world-class philanthropy before Tarbell's exposé, saw his reputation around the world forever altered. President Theodore Roosevelt used Tarbell's findings of anti-competitive practices, especially lower-than-market shipping rates Standard Oil negotiated with the railroads, to push for increased government regulation. In that atmosphere, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled that Standard Oil had to be broken into smaller units to decrease its sometimes adverse impact on wholesale and retail fuel prices.

Tarbell, only mildly devoted to organized religion, instead made accuracy her bible. Whether they know it or not, the investigative journalists of A.D. 2001 owe a great deal to Ida Tarbell. ■

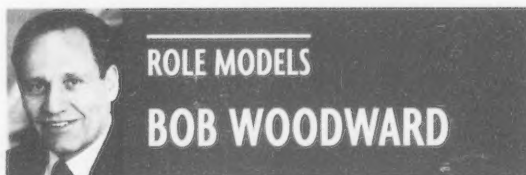
Steve Weinberg, a longtime contributing editor to *CJR*, is writing a biography of Ida Tarbell with the help of an Alicia Patterson Fellowship and a grant from the Fund for Investigative Journalism.

ALICIA PATTERSON FELLOWSHIP LIBRARY

1996 book, *News Values*: "No one has ever achieved objective journalism, and no one ever could." Fuller reminds us that "the bias of the observer always enters the picture, if not coloring the details at least guiding the choice of them." He then explains: "I don't use bias here as a term of opprobrium. One might have an optimistic bias or a bias toward virtue. It is the inevitable consequence of the combination of one's experience and inbred nature." Our goal, instead, should be "work of genuine intellectual integrity." This means journalists should link "the truth discipline in journalism with the highest standards in scientific and academic debate," and then apply the "Golden Rule" — to play square.

In 1992, I took my evidence suggesting Senator Packwood's pattern of misuse of senatorial power to *The Washington Post*. Woodward believes the *Post* "would have been remiss" if it had not taken on the story. Almost a year after the Anita Hill-Clarence Thomas hearings, the *Post* understood why Packwood's behavior was a public issue. Yet I can't tell you how many people I have met who have assumed some personal partisanship on my part, asking me whether Packwood had ever made an improper advance to me or whether I had ever experienced serious sexual harassment. The answers are "no" and "no," although certainly like so many women in the workplace, I occasionally had been subjected to obnoxious remarks. Does the fact that I am a woman make me more likely than a man to have recognized this particular kind of abuse of power? Of course. Should Woodward's Navy service during the Vietnam war have disqualified him from reporting Watergate? Should Kate Boo's observations about her mother's poverty have prevented her from reporting on the economically disadvantaged? Personal experience should not be a disqualification in journalism.

What happened to me as a child? I write with some trepidation about Waco, Texas, where I grew up. I have seen how easily reporters — even if unintentionally — stereotyped my hometown of more than 100,000 people, and con-



There are a lot of people I admire. Lincoln Steffens. I was aware of the history of what Steffens and his colleagues had done in the early part of the twentieth century. And then of course there was Vietnam, before Watergate. I was in the Navy from 1965 to 1970 and saw it up close, and read the reporting on it. Of course, there was David Halberstam's book. I guess if there's a role model, it's him."

Bob Woodward has been a reporter and editor at The Washington Post since 1971.

"Role Models" interviews with Neil Hickey.



sequently how easy it would be for a reader to project those stereotypes onto what I am about to tell you. Waco — "the heart of Texas" — is halfway between Dallas and Austin and just a few minutes from President George W. Bush's ranch in the tiny town of Crawford. Another tiny nearby community — Mount Carmel — was where David Koresh's Branch Davidian compound exploded in flames in 1993. This tragic event became known in the press and the culture as simply "Waco," leaving the town unfairly synonymous with weird people. I don't know anyone in Waco other than some local journalists who had ever heard of Koresh before the standoff, and the truth is that Waco is far more diverse than most people outside of Texas imagine. Its accomplished citizens include Dr. T. Berry Brazelton, the early childhood specialist, Ann Richards, the salty and liberal former Texas governor, and Robert Fulghum, the minister and author of *All I Really Need to Know I Learned in Kindergarten*. So much for stereotypes.

And I am acutely aware of how dangerous it can be to focus on moments in time, to try to recall accurately childhood experiences through the lens of an adult. But sometimes that's our only choice.

Over the years I have wondered, on occasion, why I had been so determined — since the time I was a young child — to pursue the path of an investigative reporter. In elementary school I remember reading biographies of famous

people and being especially taken by those of Ida Tarbell and Nellie Bly, two turn-of-the twentieth century muckrakers. I remember thinking, "That's what I want to do."

But why had their lives resonated with me, a baby boomer from a relatively prosperous Texas family, growing up when most women didn't consider professional careers? Looking back, I realize the extent to which growing up in Texas during the 1950s and 1960s shaped my future as a journalist. Negotiating life there helped me see just how skillfully people can operate on different, sometimes incongruent, levels, and how difficult it can be to figure out what is really going on.

I couldn't stop wondering about certain aspects of life in Texas. Why were there separate drinking fountains for "whites" and "coloreds" in public places? Why did my close friend's parents treat her decision to marry a Catholic as if there had been a death in the family? Why weren't Jews allowed to join the country club? Why should girls bother to excel in school if they were not entitled to use their knowledge in the world beyond the home?

I had difficulty reconciling all this. Church was a huge part of our lives, and there was not the slightest doubt that Jesus taught we should love our neighbors as ourselves, and that *everyone* was our neighbor (remember the Good Samaritan?). Our teachers told us how lucky we were to live in America, because everyone in a democracy is created equal and has equal opportunities. But it was obvious to me that there was a huge disconnect between what we were told and what people seemed actually to believe and do. I was constantly confused.

We had a housekeeper named Genner (pronounced "Gina") Hastings, a deeply religious black woman who worked at our home for many years, and I realize now that our relationship helped shape me. I loved Genner, and I believe she loved me — although I'm now open to the possibility that my perception of her love for me may have been mediated by the fact that she was paid by my parents to clean, cook, and help care for me and my four siblings.

But from my childhood perspective, Genner was a member of our family. She

was a great cook who prepared much of our food, including specialties such as homemade mayonnaise, biscuits, and individual apricot pies that my brother almost inhaled as they came out of the oven. I happily planted wet kisses on her and she on me. Genner and I were so close that I remember feeling comfortable probing more deeply about skin color, which I gradually learned — from observation — divided us. Why was hers black and mine white? What did it feel like to be black? She knew these questions were asked out of a child's need to understand, and she answered them all matter-of-factly: God made some people white, some black, she explained. She waved off my efforts to engage her in what we would now call political discussions.

Yet I recall becoming mystified, disturbed — and even embarrassed — that many businesses even had back entrances that “coloreds” were required to use. When I would ask why, no one ever gave me an answer that made any sense. I once stole a sip from a “colored” drinking fountain, as if to dare the powers that be. What would happen? Would I get spanked? Would someone call the police? Would I get sick or perhaps even turn black? Nothing happened.

True friendship requires reciprocity, and as I got older and realized that Genner had a separate and very different life, I remember feeling the pain I thought *she* should feel. She went home to her tiny house in a dilapidated neighborhood on Sixth Street, while we lived in a spacious Georgian colonial with big white columns in a beautiful park.

As it turns out, I was reading the biographies of Ida Tarbell and Nellie Bly about the same time Rosa Parks had refused to give up her seat on the Birmingham bus. I realize now that during the early tumultuous years of that phase of the civil rights struggle, I was learning a profound lesson in how the personal can become political.

As time passed, the news was filled with stories about Selma and Little Rock and Martin Luther King. My heart went along on those walks for freedom. I was



ROLE MODELS KATHERINE BOO

“I once was researching a nothing little story at the reading room of the FBI, which was empty except for me and a man who was hunched over, amid these enormous piles of papers. I recognized him as Taylor Branch, although I’d never met him. Just seeing him fascinated me. What was he doing? What makes it worth it — this lonely, difficult process of going through tens of thousands of documents? What’s it for? He was researching his book *Parting the Waters*, a wonderful telling of the civil rights movement, a labor of love and passion. Just seeing him there in the reading room made a big impression on me.

Jason DeParle of *The New York Times* also influenced me because he has devoted his career to writing about poverty in America in original, non-ideological ways, getting deeper in his pieces than the usual stereotypes. John Hersey was a reporter who could take something as ineffable and difficult as the atomic bomb and cover it from a point of view that let the reader see what it really meant. What interests me is not necessarily the person who does one good investigative piece, but the people who do it over and over again. Bob Woodward, for example, finds it in himself to keep alive that intellectual curiosity, and to do the backbreaking labor.”

Katherine Boo is a Pulitzer Prize-winning investigative reporter for The Washington Post.

told that actually blacks were very happy, but the ungodly communists were stirring things up so the Soviet Union could then take over a weakened America. I might have believed that, but I knew the spirit, the humanity, of “the other,” and I was sensitive to the inherent unfairness that flowed simply from the color of Genner’s skin.

As I got older, I realized that I wasn’t getting good answers to my many questions because there were no good answers, certainly none consistent with what I was taught at church and school. There seemed to be a tacit agreement to accept some things just as they are, what some writers call the “shared narrative,” which can turn into unquestioned story lines dictating our lives.

I have come to realize, too, that my journalistic questions about Washington have been a variation on my efforts to penetrate childhood mysteries, an almost biological imperative to question the status quo. In the case of Senator Packwood, for example, why wasn’t any major news organization tackling an obvious follow-up

story of the Hill-Thomas hearings — the problem of sexual harassment on Capitol Hill? How had the Senator gotten away with behavior that had been rumored in Washington for almost two decades? As I reported the story, I began to realize that Packwood’s exploitation of women fit into Washington’s “shared narrative”: for some, such behavior was simply a perk of power.

By now I know some answers to my neighbor’s question about what “happened” to me as a child: I learned that a measure of truth can be right in front of you; that to see it you sometimes have to shift your focus or imagine yourself in someone else’s place; and that finding it involves many types of searches, some of which take a long time. I learned to question authority, appearances, the majority’s view, and the way things are always done; to be aware of the dangers of generalizing and of adhering to any fixed ideology.

These lessons became especially poignant for me during the past year when I found another personal relationship

with a female of a different race sparking a whole new set of questions — personal, political, and journalistic. After many years of marriage, my husband and I traveled to China last year to adopt our daughter, Grace, now four. I think often about what is “happening” to Grace as she negotiates childhood. She asks “why” a million times a day. And I see more clearly how naturally children — who haven’t yet learned the artifices of adults — can ask surprisingly penetrating questions about aspects of life we sometimes want to hide from or soften, or don’t even see. Thanks to her, I have what seems like a million new questions of my own as I make plans to write about national and international issues that I previously was blind to. Sometimes my work may overlap with Grace’s inevitable search for the truth of who she is and why she is here. Whatever she does in life, someday I’ll tell her what I have learned: to be true to her own experience. To be guided not by some false idea of objectivity, but by intellectual honesty and the Golden Rule. ■

EYE OF THE STORM

Why Jeff Gerth, a most accomplished investigator, is also most controversial

BY TED GUP



In 1902, Ida Tarbell made a name for herself as a pioneering muck-raker exposing the excesses of Standard Oil. Al-

most seven decades later, a fresh-faced young man in Standard Oil of Ohio's market research department found himself spending his days in a car at shopping centers and truck-stops, stealthily peering through binoculars, spying on the competition. He was scribbling down the license plates of vehicles pulling in and out of garages and filling stations, gathering intelligence on why motorists were choosing Standard Oil's rivals. It was an early object lesson in the conduct of business.

The name of that studious employee was Jeff Gerth. He would soon leave Standard Oil and go on to become perhaps the most accomplished and, of late, most controversial investigative reporter at *The New York Times*. His storied career there spans a quarter century, during which time he has, in his own indefatigable fashion, rattled the White House, Congress, and corporate America, influenced national policy and debate, and compiled an enviable record of solid, sometimes groundbreaking reportage.

Gerth was one of the first to introduce the public to the name of Osama Bin Laden, today linked to allegations of terrorism. It was Gerth who broke the Whitewater story and exposed Hillary



Jeff Gerth picks up a Pulitzer from Columbia Provost Jonathan Cole

Clinton's wildly successful commodities trading and its connection to one of Arkansas' largest regulated industries. And it was Gerth who, two years ago, shared a Pulitzer for exposing how American firms gave the Chinese access to sensitive technology related to satellite launches. Most recently he and a *Times* colleague produced a 25,000-word exegesis on the pharmaceutical industry.

"The vast majority of stories I've done have not been controversial," says Gerth. That is true, but it is also true that some of his stories, particularly of late, have put Gerth and the *Times* under a spotlight. He has been accused of being too close to his sources. His seminal reporting on the Whitewater story and his aggressive coverage of Wen Ho Lee, the former Los Alamos scientist, have made

Gerth-bashing something of a sport among media critics, partisans, and some readers, and sparked attacks on his newspaper. William Powers, media critic of the *National Journal*, speaks of "the cowboyization of the *Times*." If that is true, then Jeff Gerth is its premier gunslinger — an image that hardly fits him.

Now fifty-six, balding and owlsh, he sits across from me in a Washington motel room, nervously eyeing my tape recorder and laptop. We get off to a rocky start. "This is off the record," he announces. "If I feel comfortable with you later, then we can go on the record. I've been singed a lot." I try to conceal my surprise that a man who has made his living holding others accountable would now try to immunize himself from his own words. I refuse, and make a mock gesture to close my laptop and call it a day. Gerth relents, agreeing to go on the record. I am not sure if this is a victory or if the master is simply testing me.

A year after Gerth won his Pulitzer, he and his paper seem gripped by an odd mix of wounded pride and soul-searching, particularly about the Wen Ho Lee story, which Gerth wrote with James Risen. Lee is the Los Alamos scientist who the *Times* reported was suspected of leaking critical nuclear secrets to the Chinese. The spying case fell apart. After months of solitary confinement, Lee was released, pleading to a single charge of downloading classified materials. The White House and a federal judge issued rare reprimands to the Justice Department for its handling of the case, and the *Times* came under enormous fire for what was viewed by many as one-sided reporting with a prosecutorial bent.



Jeff Gerth often starts stories that others pick up, while he moves on. Among them, left to right: early reporting on Osama bin Laden, on the sharing of U.S. technology with China, on the Whitewater land deal, and, with James Risen, on Wen Ho Lee.

Some *Times* editors outwardly deride their critics, dismissing them as out of touch with the complexities of investigative reporting. The paper's investigations editor, Stephen Engelberg, speaks of "drive-by" criticisms. "In today's environment," he says, "the facts don't matter." Still, his words and those of others belie a painful groping for answers conducted outside the glare of public scrutiny. Among themselves, *Times* reporters continue to debate and dissect the paper's coverage. With so much on the line — the reputations of veteran journalists and the trust between reporters and editors, as well as the credibility of the newspaper — it is clear that the editors at the *Times* were taken aback by the ferocity of the reaction to the Lee story. "The things that grow out of any given story," says Engelberg, "are shocking even to us — the hurricanes, the inflated rhetoric — the whole thing that was in part created by us consumes us too in the end." It is precisely the stature of Gerth and the *Times* that renders such biting criticism from outsiders so unsettling.

After twenty-five years with the *Times*, twenty-one of them in Washington, Gerth is the consummate insider, and yet little is known of him beyond his byline. "I am anonymous," he says proudly. He is right.

"I had no idea even what he looked like," says the *Times's* Washington bu-

reau chief, Jill Abramson, recalling their first meeting just before she joined the paper three years ago. "He had been a name I had only associated with fear up to that point." Abramson spent some years as an investigative reporter at *The Wall Street Journal*, when she viewed Gerth as a most formidable competitor.

His invisibility is no accident. Gerth shuns television appearances, avoids public talks, attends few parties, has written no books, and is, as he himself admits, a "homebody." He married at thirty-nine and became a father a year later. His wife, Janice O'Connell, works on the Foreign Relations Committee for Senator Christopher Dodd, who, during the 1996 Presidential campaign, chaired the Democratic National Committee. Gerth recused himself from any campaign coverage.

"Some people will jokingly tell you that I used it as an excuse to get out of stories I don't like to do," he laughs. But he did pursue a story later that focused in part on Bernard L. Schwartz, one of the largest personal contributors to the Democratic National Committee. Schwartz was head of Loral Space and Communications of Manhattan and an integral part of Gerth's 1998 stories on satellite technology that was shared with the Chinese. That story helped fuel a congressional investigation by Representative Christopher Cox, a California Republican.

Like all reporters, Gerth has been the beneficiary of partisan sources, but there

is little evidence in his work to suggest any political pattern or party agenda. He is unlikely to show up on the guest list of Newt Gingrich or Bill Clinton. Gerth is a registered voter — an independent. He closely guards his privacy and says he is sensitive to that of others. "I have assiduously avoided writing about people's private lives in my career," he says. That is especially true when it comes to the seamier side of private lives. During the confirmation hearings of Clarence Thomas for U.S. Supreme Court Justice, Gerth says, he did not follow through with an assignment to ferret out the titles of pornographic videos Thomas may have rented.

Gerth's respect for others' privacy — his focus on actions, not personalities — is laudable, but in the extreme can give rise to stories that are too narrowly circumscribed. One of the criticisms of the *Times's* coverage of Wen Ho Lee, one that the paper acknowledged in its published post-mortem, was that readers were told little about Lee as a human being. The absence of what might be called "life details" reduced Lee to a mere suspect, a one-dimensional figure, opaque and unworthy of empathy. This is a recurrent problem in investigative reporting, and it does not help when, as in the Lee case, the subject is unwilling to talk to the reporter.

Gerth's own life was redefined four years ago by ordeal. His only child, Jessi-

OSAMA BIN LADEN: AP/WIDEWORLD; ROCKET: AP/WIDEWORLD; HILARY CLINTON: AP/WIDEWORLD; DENIS PAQUIN: WEN HO LEE: AP/WIDEWORLD; JIM OREO

'THIS IS OFF THE RECORD,' GERTH SAYS. 'I'VE BEEN SINGED A LOT'

ca, underwent eleven hours of surgery after a serious illness. Jessica is now sixteen. Gerth boasts that he has not missed a single one of her soccer games in two years, even though they are played on weekday afternoons.

"If I went through that, I can go through anything," he says. "It changed my life, it changed my family's life. It made me realize that the most important things in my life are not what I do during the day at work. The stories come and go, praise comes and goes, criticism comes and goes, and they all shall pass — and they do pass."

He swims almost daily, watches his diet, plays jazz piano, can still, on a good day, shoot a seventy-four on the links, and is, by all accounts, level-headed — an unlikely candidate to be at the center of any journalistic furor. "He's a profoundly sane, grounded person, and that's unusual," says Abramson. "Most investigative reporters are neurotic and high-strung and very insecure — sometimes, prickly."

"I am no different than anybody else," says Gerth. "I make mistakes and don't have perfect judgment. I take criticism seriously. When I make a mistake and either I find out about it or somebody brings it to my attention, I correct it. Those are the kinds of mistakes and criticisms that I take seriously."

"Then," he goes on, "there is, I guess, what you would call the political or ad

hominem or non-substantive criticisms." He puts criticism of his work on Whitewater, for example, in those categories. Gerth seems more open to correction than to self-examination. It is as if criticism might be limited to questions of fact alone.

Gerth's entry into journalism does not lend itself to easy romanticization. In the early 1960s as a student at affluent Shaker Heights High in Ohio, he was a member of the Junior Council on World Affairs and captain of the golf team. From there he went to Northwestern, not to its renowned journalism program, but to get a degree in business administration. He had a knack for numbers and a taste for business. His father was in real estate, manufacturing, and steel. Gerth spent another year at Northwestern in the graduate business program but left before getting the degree. He later did much the same at Columbia University. Then he found himself accepting a string of positions with foundations, law firms, and corporations, all of which availed themselves of his genius for research. He applied to law school in the mid-1970s and was accepted, but dreaded practicing law. In truth, he had no idea what to do next.

He was not untouched by the skepticism of the sixties and early seventies.

One early Gerth piece, published in *Penthouse* in 1974, focused on Richard Nixon and organized crime. "Yet behind the shadows of Watergate lurks another series of questionable Nixon associations — those with the underworld," wrote Gerth. "Rather than accuse Richard Nixon of wrongdoing, this report raises a series of questions and describes coincidences and associations that demand further inquiry by the public, the press, legislatures, and investigative agencies." In places, the writing borders on the lurid ("you begin to glimpse the sinister forces that plague the highest office in the land") and relies on innuendo in a story that is markedly less sophisticated than the stories he now writes for the *Times*.

One of the two books Gerth cites as most meaningful to him is Bob Woodward's and Carl Bernstein's *All the President's Men*, the story of the Watergate investigation. (Curiously, the other book he names is F. Scott Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby*.) But the simplicity of his attraction to journalism might well confound detractors who see in him all manner of hidden agendas. What Gerth says drew him to journalism was not a reformist bent, but the realization that someone would pay him to do research. "I like to find things out," he says, "and I like then for other people to know. I don't think I could say that I went into journalism to try and save the world."

JEFF GERTH'S GREATEST HITS

Who better than Jeff Gerth to sort through a quarter century of his investigative reporting to find those stories that have meant the most to him? "A lot of what I've done could be boiled down to looking at how the public sector and the private sector interact, intersect, the way in which people and policies come together," he says. So, from among a long list suggested by Gerth, here are some of them:

- Seminal reporting done with reporter Seymour Hersh in 1977 into Gulf & Western Industries Inc.'s corporate practices and conduct, including the private use of corporate resources, questionable practices in the reporting of the company's financial condition to shareholders, potential conflicts of interest, and tax practices.
- Reporting in 1981 on the activities of former CIA officers Edwin P. Wilson and Frank E. Terpil, and their role in the illegal exporting of explosives to Muammar el-Qaddafi's Libya.
- Articles in 1985 and 1986 documenting official corruption within the regime of President Ferdinand E. Marcos of the Philippines, as well as the extent of Marcos's private and hidden financial empire.
- Articles in 1993 that challenged the stereotype of Saudi

Arabia as a nation of endless wealth. The articles focused on how Saudi Arabia had lived beyond its means, and how the country that once relied on petrodollars was now forced to buy on credit. The articles examined how the economic sea change had altered U.S.-Saudi relations.

■ A March 1994 article revealing that Hillary Rodham Clinton made about \$100,000 in the commodities market within a single year, based on advice from an attorney representing one of Arkansas's regulated industries, Tyson Foods Inc., the nation's largest poultry company.

■ A series of articles done with other *Times* staff members throughout 1998 on the questionable sharing of sensitive satellite technology by U.S. corporations with the Chinese. The stories won the 1999 Pulitzer Prize in national reporting, awarded to the *Times* staff, "notably Jeff Gerth." The Pulitzer commendation cited investigations and significant changes in policy prompted by the stories.

■ A series of articles done along with the *Times* reporter Sheryl Gay Stolberg appearing throughout 2000 that focused on the vast influence of the pharmaceutical industry, and how it markets and prices its products.

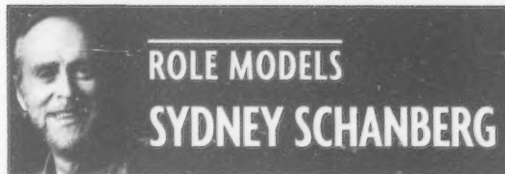
— Ted Gup

He speaks in shorthand: "I am not Sy Hersh," he says, referring to his friend and mentor, nearly as well known for his moral outrage as for his legendary reporting coups. "If I were a crusader," Gerth says, "I wouldn't have dropped the Whitewater story. I would have stayed on it and continued to write more and more stories. I don't stay on stories a long time. If I were a crusader I would have stayed on the Wen Ho Lee case for two years. If you look at the record of what I've done, you'll see I don't stay in one area too long. I move on. I don't go out and write books about stories I wrote. I don't go on TV to discuss my stories. If I really were heavily invested in my stories I would do all those things . . . That's not the kind of person I am."

And that, admits Gerth, is just about as introspective as he gets. Shy and self-conscious, he is more at ease speaking of his stories than of himself. Today he is a capable interviewer, but he first made his mark working with documents — more a Paper Person than a People Person. "The *Times* hired me because they mistakenly thought I was an accountant," he says.

Complexities that send lesser reporters fleeing are the very stuff that draws Gerth to a story — the challenge of untangling a knot, of making sense of financial shenanigans, of finding nuggets in SEC 10b-6s and IRS 990s. Gerth is most at home in a maze. He could tease a page-one story out of a footnote. But along with that uncanny skill comes the risk of myopia, of being consumed by detail at the expense of context. Some close readers see that problem in Gerth's work on Whitewater. "His [first] story was incomprehensible," says an experienced Washington investigative reporter who asked that his name not be used. "I probably read the piece fifteen times trying to figure out what he was talking about."

Gerth's many colleagues and friends speak of him as if he were a national resource, his detractors as if he were a menace to the profession. It is difficult at times to square the two. "I was overwhelmed at how great an investigator



ROLE MODELS SYDNEY SCHANBERG

"My role models at the start of my career were not investigative reporters because that phrase was never used. All good reporting is investigative to some degree. There were people like Homer Bigart, who were meticulous in their reporting. He was the digger; he stayed late at night to get it right. Also, Edith Evans Asbury. She's over 90 now, and is retired from The New York Times. The paper didn't have an investigative team back then, but she'd go out on court cases and dig things up. She was tenacious.



Homer Bigart

She would get her teeth into somebody's ankle and wouldn't let go. I learned from people like that; they didn't care whose ox was being gored or what sacred cow was mooing into the publisher's ear.

"If I were to tell you that there's one person whose investigative stuff I respect most, whom I personally know, it would be Sy Hersh. But there were others I never met, like George Seldes, who was writing about the cigarette industry long before anybody wanted to print his stuff. Newspapers weren't interested because they were running tobacco advertising. I consider him to be a very brave man and a hero because he was shunned by the mainstream press, and even at his death barely got any recognition. I wouldn't say he got everything right; nobody ever does. Investigative reporting, really, is shoe-leather reporting. You go out, ring doorbells, talk to people. You don't sit on your duff in the office. You go to people's houses and have the door slammed in your face."

Sydney Schanberg won a Pulitzer in 1976 for his coverage of Cambodia in The New York Times.



Edith Evans Asbury

he was," says Stanley Sporkin, a former CIA general counsel, chief of enforcement at the Securities and Exchange Commission, and federal judge. "He was absolutely superlative. I just couldn't understand how this guy was so good and getting stuff our people [at the SEC] couldn't get with all the power of the government behind them. He is, I think, the premier investigator of his day. I found him to be a man of great integrity, a person who always had the facts."

Seymour Hersh, who ushered Gerth into *The New York Times*, agrees. "He's a complete professional," says Hersh. "I can't work with anybody — I couldn't even edit my child's stories, but I worked with Gerth for years without a problem. The only quibble I have with him, is that I wish he'd throw a typewriter once in a while and say 'I want three thousand words, not two thousand words.' He's too nice a guy. He's one of those guys who does it and gives it his best shot and goes on to the next thing."

Gene Roberts, a professor of journalism at the University of Maryland, and managing editor of the *Times* from 1994 to 1997, has nothing but praise for Gerth. He remembers that after Gerth broke the story of Hillary Clinton's commodities trading, he and Joseph Lelyveld, the executive editor, were at a Washington cocktail party. Roberts recalls that one of Washington's most celebrated journalists walked up to Lelyveld and said, "You know I respect you, but this is a ridiculous story." And Joe, I think, had the perfect answer. He said, "If you think that, then you won't have to chase it, will you?" The *Times* has grown accustomed to gloating over Gerth's exclusives.

But there are those in the field of investigative reporting who have reservations about Gerth's approach. Brant Houston, executive director of Investigative Reporters and Editors, a professional association based at the University of Missouri that represents some 4,500 jour-

nalists, says his members are divided on the subject of Jeff Gerth. Some admire the reporter without reservation. Others express concern over his handling of stories.

Some prominent investigative reporters, meanwhile, are quite critical but, fearful of offending Gerth or the *Times*, will speak only on background. They argue that he has a tendency to insinuate without proof.

Few stories have generated more antagonism than Gerth's initial reporting

IT IS AS IF CRITICISM MUST BE LIMITED TO QUESTIONS OF FACT

on Whitewater in March of 1992. That first Gerth story on Whitewater revealed that beginning in 1978, while Clinton was Arkansas attorney general, he and his wife, Hillary, were partners in an Ozark real estate deal with James B. McDougal. When Clinton was governor, McDougal controlled a bank and Madison Guaranty, a savings and loan. Gerth's stories raised the question of whether it was appropriate for the then governor to be in partnership with those having immediate financial interests in an industry regulated by the state. Questions also were raised about whether the failed savings and loan was the beneficiary of preferential regulatory treatment.

One of the few observers who attempts to meld together the two views of Gerth — profound respect and serious criticism — is Lanny J. Davis, former special counsel to President Clinton, and author of *Truth to Tell: Notes From My White House Education*. Davis is obviously not neutral on the subject of Clinton, but it was Gerth who suggested I contact Davis.

"I'm a pretty good expert on Jeff Gerth," Davis says. "I did battle with him regularly and I got to know him better than most. I would rank him one of the two or three best reporters I worked with. I rank on two grounds: first, do they dig and find facts as opposed to rushing into innuendo journalism, which I'm afraid too many reporters are often too quick to do. I don't think Jeff does that. Second, on the character basis: I think Jeff has one hundred percent integrity. He is probably the most dedicated and ethical journalist I came across."

"I am leading to a great big *but*," warns Davis. He takes pains to make clear that his reservations are not about Gerth's aggressiveness. "I think it's part of the profession, looking for blood," he says. The problem in Davis's eyes is that some reporters — Gerth most definitely among them — practice a kind of "connect-the-dot journalism" in which individual facts are presented as patterns suggesting causation or culpability that may or may not be warranted. "Bob Woodward argues that if reporters didn't do that, Watergate would never have been broken, and he's exactly right," Davis concedes. "Woodward's argument

is that there is a difference between *post hoc ergo propter hoc* and circumstantial evidence that leads a reasonable person to a reasonable conclusion. I'd say that's a very fine distinction and a dangerous conclusion." Connecting the dots, Davis says, "can also lead someone to the wrong conclusion and can smear someone's reputation."

Gerth's Whitewater land-deal stories, says Davis, illustrate how facts can be laid out in a way that inevitably leads the reader to conclude, for example, "that Hillary Clinton took advantage of her position as the wife of the governor and did something wrong — something that's undefined and, to this day, has never been very well defined."

"There's no way to read that story [Whitewater] without there being a negative inference about the Clintons," Davis says. "It's not a neutral story." Yet Gerth "has defended it to me over lunches we've had. This is a famous 'Jeffism': 'I can't be held responsible for the inferences that people draw from the facts, that's not my role. My role is to write the facts. Show me one inaccuracy in the story and I'll correct it if I'm wrong.'" A particular ordering or arrangement of facts, says Davis, can, and often does, produce an unwarranted conclusion.

Davis says he was even more disturbed by Gerth's reporting on Webb Hubbell, the former Justice Department official who came under criminal investigation during what came to be called Whitewater. On that story, Davis says that as special counselor to Clinton, he took an active role in responding to Gerth's questions. He was troubled by how efforts to help the beleaguered Hubbell find work and get retainers to help defray legal expenses were portrayed not as the efforts of concerned friends but rather as an attempt to raise hush money.

All of this "doesn't affect my judgment of his integrity," says Davis. "It does affect my judgment of the journalism that he practices."

Eight years after his first Whitewater story, Gerth remains confident of its merit. "The New York Times has never

run a correction of the story because there's nothing to correct," says Gerth. Of more interest is how Gerth and his editors coped with criticism. To our meeting Gerth brings a letter that executive editor Lelyveld wrote on February 17, 1999, in answer to Max Brantley, editor of the *Arkansas Times*. Gerth lays the letter on the table like a trump card. Lelyveld writes,

No we won't be investigating the 'dry holes' of Whitewater or singing the praises of Gene Lyons [author of *Fools for Scandal: How the Media Invented Whitewater*]. We stand by 'that fateful Whitewater story' and continue to think the small-time partnership of a Presidential candidate with the head of a failed S & L was a legitimate matter to call to the attention of our readers. How that story blew up into the Starr investigation and how the Starr investigation blew up into the Lewinsky affair are interesting questions for some historian to explore. It wasn't because of Jeff Gerth. We think we faithfully asked questions that needed to be asked and that we reported these stories to the best of our ability, even when answers weren't forthcoming. If I may draw a parallel closer to where we happen to live, it would be to point out that Al D'Amato, our recently defrocked Senator, was never convicted of anything despite numerous newspaper investigations by us and some of our local competitors. We don't say he should have been. We also don't apologize for calling attention to his wheeling and dealing. It's pretty much the same deal here, as far as I can see. But thanks for the thought.

Sincerely,
Joe Lelyveld

It is certainly true that Gerth's Whitewater stories, precise and relatively small-caliber, set in motion the juggernaut that rocked the Clinton administration, Congress, and the press. Of course, by then, Gerth was on to other stories. Even he seemed a little puzzled over what all the fuss was about. Abramson says she fears that the *Times* and its reporters are sometimes held accountable for things they never wrote, but which, in the frenzied aftermath of such stories, are attributed to the *Times*, as other reporters amplify, summarize, or characterize the original story.

Gerth also played a brief but significant role in the reporting of the Monica

Lewinsky scandal. It was Gerth who reported a controversial Sunday meeting between Clinton and his personal secretary, Betty Currie. At the meeting, according to Currie, Clinton asked her a number of sensitive questions, including whether she remembered his ever being alone with Lewinsky. To many, Gerth's story suggested that the president was attempting to coach Currie in her answers to investigators, or, at the very least, to help Clinton prepare his own testimony. The story landed on Washington like an incendiary device. Behind the story was another story. Gerth's editors, he says, were pushing him to make the lead more forceful. The editors wanted him to, in his words, "characterize rather than just reflect" what happened. Gerth said he resisted efforts to say that the accounts of Clinton and Currie "contradicted" each other. "I was under great stress and pressure on deadline at a very late hour — and I am not a late-hour person — I am usually in bed at the time this incident took place. I relented and let them use the word 'differ' letting them think they had won a great victory when in fact in my mind the word 'differ' means nothing because almost any two people or things can differ, it doesn't mean they contradict each other."

But such nuances, Gerth and his editors concede, are often lost on Washington, once partisans and press begin to push and pull at a story. In this Gerth is hardly alone. Many veteran investigative reporters, among them Woodward, Abramson, and Hersh, and recently Michael Isikoff, have found their work at the center of controversy.

The Wen Ho Lee story anchored the *Times's* front page on March 6, 1999, and left its competitors in its wake. The *Times* ran a two-column headline that declared CHINA STOLE NUCLEAR SECRETS FOR BOMBS, U.S. AIDES SAY. The article spoke of an as-yet-unidentified Chinese American. A government official was quoted as saying the case was "going to be just as bad as the Rosenbergs," referring to the couple convicted of atomic spying who were executed in 1953 in Sing Sing prison's electric chair. "If somebody says it and is in a position of authority, who am I to censor somebody?" asks Gerth, defending the use of the quote.

As anyone who followed the saga knows, the paper's coverage of Wen Ho Lee came under withering criticism. The *Times* ran an extraordinary editor's comment headlined THE *TIMES* AND WEN HO LEE, in which the paper simultaneously attempted to defend its reporters and its reporting, while allowing that the paper did not do all it might have done in the name of editorial balance. It vowed to continue to both pursue the story and examine its own handling of the matter. *Media Life*, an online magazine, summarized what many took to be the gist of the paper's position: "*Times*: We coulda, we shoulda, but no apology." The *National Journal's* Powers wrote that "reading it was like watching a tape of a criminal who can't quite confess."

It is a sensitive subject for all involved at the *Times*, particularly for Jeff Gerth, who played a key role in the first Wen Ho Lee stories. "I am not going to talk a lot about Wen Ho Lee," he says. "There's litigation still out there and an investigation still out there and moreover, I think it may be years if not decades before we get a fuller picture, when all the materials are declassified and we finally find out what happened, what China did do, what Wen Ho Lee did do." He is unwilling to articulate any lessons learned from the Wen Ho Lee story beyond saying that intelligence stories, by their nature, are fraught with danger.

At times it sounds as though Gerth is distancing himself from his own stories on Wen Ho Lee, suggesting that — despite his role as the *Times's* chief investigator and his page-one bylines on the story — questions about the reporting are best directed elsewhere. Says Gerth: "I was not involved in that story for a long time... the day he [Lee] was fired, [James] Risen did a story — I was in New York that day — I am not trying to defend or deny anything, I'm just saying that if you have questions about the whole coverage of Wen Ho Lee, I don't think I am the person to address them to. It's not an area [intelligence] I write about a lot. I was brought into the story and was not involved in it a lot after the initial couple of stories." He later spoke of Risen as "the lead reporter" on the story. Indeed Notra Trulock III, the former intelligence director at the Energy Department who was a key source for the *Times's* Wen Ho

Lee coverage, says that he dealt exclusively with Risen, and met Gerth only after the stories were printed. Risen is a former Detroit and Washington bureau chief for the *Los Angeles Times* who covers the CIA for the *Times*. He declined to comment for this story.

One veteran Washington investigative reporter who is sharply critical of the Wen Ho Lee coverage notes that, in the wider investigation of Chinese intelligence activities by the press and Congress, Gerth and Risen had abundant company. "There was a wholesale breakdown of skepticism," he said. Case in point: a *New York Times* editorial that declared: "The United States might as well have dumped its most sensitive defense secrets on Pennsylvania Avenue for the Chinese spies to pick up." Gerth bristles at the mention of some publications' take on the story. "I read some things, I don't read other things. I am a tougher critic of myself than anybody on the outside. I'm harder on myself than my editors are on me. It's a free world. People can write whatever they want."

"The fact of the matter is that any story can be held up, put under a microscope and rearranged an infinite number of ways and done better or worse. I could take any story I've done two weeks, two months, two years, two decades later, and find a better way to have said what I was trying to say with the benefit of hindsight. You always know more later. You can't wait till you have a hundred percent knowledge to write a story or you'll never write a story."

That hindsight helps is one of the themes at the *Times* as the wagons are circled in defense of the Wen Ho Lee coverage. "The easiest thing in the world to do — the easiest thing — is to go behind the people who do the path-breaking stories, wait eighteen months, two years, five years, and say things were not exactly as reported," says Engelberg. "What a surprise! What did you expect? I don't think anybody's reporting can withstand the march of history." Abramson puts it another way. "You're doing the story based on the best information you have."

Were there warning signs and questions in the Wen Ho Lee story that might

'I'M HARDER ON MYSELF THAN MY EDITORS ARE ON ME'

have raised questions not in hindsight but contemporaneous with the reporting? Bill Keller, the *Times's* managing editor, says the paper made no presumption of innocence or guilt with regard to Wen Ho Lee. But placing the story above the fold with a headline that could be reduced to SPY? clearly passed some internal threshold that telegraphed to millions of readers that there was a credible case for espionage.

No one at the *Times* is even remotely speaking of the Wen Ho Lee story as fundamentally wrong, or suggesting publicly that it represents some kind of systemic failure at the paper. But individual editors do seem somewhat chastened by the experience and willing to discuss some of the lessons there may be for future investigative stories. "I think that the danger of investigative journalism broadly is to have too prosecutorial a tone," says Abramson, "and in hindsight, going over those stories and rereading them as I did, many times, there are a few instances of that — words, balancing paragraphs, that would have been better to be higher in the stories."

Times editors also point out that Notra Trulock, after leaving the Energy Department, became a spokesman for the conservative Free Congress Foundation, raising concerns that he may have had something of a political agenda. But they deny that Risen or Gerth was duped by Trulock or anyone else.

For his part, Trulock denies having any agenda beyond shoring up what he saw as lax security in government labs. He says he voted twice for Bill Clinton, and that he took his current job because it was the only one he could find in the wake of the Wen Ho Lee episode. He was out of work for three months, he says, and on April 5 filed for personal bankruptcy.

The centrality of Trulock's role in the Wen Ho Lee saga underscores, for some *Times* editors, a subtle and humbling lesson for all reporters — that one need not be gullible to be misled. "Trulock," says Keller, "was putting the direst possible face on what he knew in order to get the attention of the people who he thought were not paying proper attention. His point of view resonated in the echo chamber of Washington to such

an extent that it influenced the vetting process that the reporters went through. Jeff Gerth and Jim Risen published stories that had multiple, multiple sources and the sources were all confirming that yes, Trulock had given this briefing and, yes, this document said such and such and it all tended to reinforce it. But what wasn't really clear from the reporting at the time was how much of the confirmation was in fact an echo of Trulock's own briefings." Those briefings, numbering about sixty, occurred on the Hill, at agencies, and throughout Washington. Their contents, Keller says, "would pop up in intelligence reports and in congressional reports and White House briefings. You could find endless numbers of sources who had heard the same information, but a lot of it was Trulock confirming Notra Trulock." Engelberg draws a similar lesson. "What we learned from this — and it's something we already knew, but one needs to be reminded again and again — is that what you hear in Washington, what you think you're hearing, what you think you're seeing, is not ever the whole story. Washington is full of people whose knowledge is derivative.

"To me," says Engelberg, "this points up the great fallacy. There is a belief in our business that if you can get two or three sources to say the same thing or if you can find a document on which this is written, then you have something you can write because if you have two sources it must be true. Of course the answer is two people who don't know anything agreeing on the same story is not nearly as good as one person who knows something. So you get at the question of not only who is talking and how many, but what is the basis of their knowledge?"

One of the few indisputable facts concerning Wen Ho Lee is this: the sixty-one-year-old Los Alamos scientist spent nine months as a prisoner, much of that time in solitary confinement and in shackles. Of fifty-nine criminal counts against Lee, fifty-eight were dropped. In September, after pleading guilty to the one remaining count, he was released without any solid evidence linking him to espionage. The judge who set him free said Lee's treatment

had "embarrassed our entire nation." Subsequently, in a lengthy two-part series that ran in February, the *Times* focused on the murkiness of the federal investigation, but the role of the *Times* itself was largely absent from the story. Keller, the paper's managing editor, says the paper chose not to focus on itself because it did not influence events, it merely reported them.

It is worth noting that FBI investigators waved the *Times's* stories in front of Lee as they interrogated him, and that, in congressional hearings, charts featured footnotes referring to articles in the *Times*. Does Keller really believe that the *Times's* responsibility in all this can be so narrowly circumscribed?

I asked him a question: "If I were a best friend or a trusted *Times* colleague, would you give me a different assessment of the Wen Ho Lee story?" He weighs the question carefully. "You are not a close friend or trusted colleague," he says.

The paper has rededicated itself to aggressive investigative reporting. And for Jeff Gerth and for the *Times*, the past several years have been as full of triumphs as turbulence, as steeped in prizes as recriminations. Working calmly in the eye of the storm has been Jeff Gerth, never oblivious to the disturbances around him but unwilling to be distracted from the investigation at hand.

"I don't believe anybody has ever spent twenty-five years at *The New York Times* doing investigative reporting," he says. "The fact I've survived so long I think indicates that I've been able to stay on a steady course. That's not to say I haven't encountered setbacks or encountered great successes, but I think I've tried and largely succeeded in maintaining an even and steady keel. One is better able to do this kind of work if one has a steady hand on the wheel." In the interview he hints that his next investigative project, about to pop any time now, will be a humdinger. ■

Ted Gup, a former Washington Post reporter, is the author of The Book of Honor: Covert Lives and Classified Deaths at the CIA, which in April won the 2000 Investigative Reporters and Editors book award. He is a professor of journalism at Case Western Reserve University.

'ONE IS BETTER ABLE TO DO THIS IF ONE HAS A STEADY HAND'

Q&A: Reporting with Computers

Some Doubts from a Founder

Philip Meyer is seventy years old, fond of professorial bow ties and known as the father of computer-assisted reporting. He holds the Knight chair in journalism at the University of North Carolina. But his elder-statesman status doesn't mean he has lost his edge. His talks still pack the halls whenever investigative reporters and editors meet, and the attendees include plenty of twenty-something computer experts. Meyer's ahead-of-the-curve reputation began with his contribution to a Detroit Free Press study of that city's deadly 1967 race riot. Wielding a then state-of-the-art IBM 360 mainframe, Meyer — then a national correspondent for Knight Newspapers — analyzed reams of survey data. His work revealed that, contrary to popular belief at the time, the college-educated were as likely to riot as high school dropouts. Thus began computer-assisted reporting — now all the rage. But Meyer scoffs at that term, preferring "Precision Journalism," the title of his 1973 book, reprinted this year. And he thinks reporters have a long way to go if they're to become true precision journalists. Meyer spoke about all this with Margaret Sullivan, editor of The Buffalo News.



How has your view of "precision journalism" changed in the era when newsrooms have a PC on every reporter's desk?

It hasn't changed at all. It's still a novel idea that I'm trying to sell and having great difficulty doing it. Pieces of it have been accepted. At first, it appeared that precision journalism was computers and if you used computers you were a precision journalist. But the computer is just a tool. You can be a precision journalist and not use computers; and you can certainly use computers and not be a precision journalist.

You think the phrase "computer-assisted reporting," then, is invalid?

I was critiquing a couple of prominent investigative projects that used computers, and one of them said — very high up —

that this is a computer-assisted reporting story. It just shows how naive journalists are to think that using computers is a big deal and we ought to tell everyone about it. My cousins in Michigan use a computer to manage their farming operation, but when they go to market they don't pull up to the unloading dock and say, "Hey, I've got these computer-assisted soybeans."

What are the biggest mistakes you see in computer-assisted reporting today? What makes you cringe?

Computers make it possible to screw up on an even-larger scale. For example, in *The Kansas City Star's* series on the high incidence of AIDS among priests, the most obvious flaw was that it compared priest deaths from AIDS with the general population. But all Roman Catholic priests are males, and males have a much higher death rate from AIDS than females. The *Star* did report the male-to-male comparison, but it was buried deep in the story. Sure, it's a journalistic tradition to give scary but misleading information in the lead and then backpedal, but the backpedal was way too late, and the spurious comparison was beyond the range of reasonable exaggeration. The computer is a wonderful tool but it greatly increases the need to start thinking like a social scientist in approaching a topic — knowing when to sample, when to run field experiments, where to apply statistical controls. I don't cringe so much at misuse as at missed opportunities, things done halfway.

As you look back over several decades of technological change in newsrooms, what have you learned?

Computers can be useful to large numbers of reporters and therefore reporters ought to learn how to use them. Instead it's become a specialty where one person in the newsroom does all the heavy-duty computing. I think journalism deserves better than that. I think we need to raise

the ante on what it means to be a journalist.

So a different kind of training is necessary?

For too long, journalism has been a refuge for people who have a math phobia. In the information age, it takes greater skill to collect, manage, and interpret data than a typical journalist's training can provide. They need knowledge of survey research, field experiments, programming, a heavy dose of statistics, and how to apply scientific reasoning to investigative projects. Some minimum level of competency in quantitative methods ought to be an entry-level requirement.

What work comes to mind as embodying the best of the new techniques?

I'm afraid I'm like a musician with perfect pitch. Even in the best stuff I can find flaws. For example, a wonderful example of precision journalism is work by Steve Doig [now a professor at Arizona State] at *The Miami Herald* showing the relationship between the year that a house was constructed and the amount of damage done by Hurricane Andrew. The theory he was testing was that houses were strong when the hurricane code was first passed in the 1950s, but then enforcement became careless and corrupt over time. Recent houses were less able to resist the hurricane than the older houses. What he didn't do was apply statistics to control for wind speed in order to show, to a finer degree, how damage increased with recency of construction. He made the basic point, which was the important journalistic thing, but I would have loved to have seen it done with even greater precision.

What can your approach bring to the future of investigative reporting?

It depends on a broader definition of investigative reporting than putting somebody in jail or getting somebody out of jail. It involves looking at structural problems in society that public policy isn't dealing with effectively. Journalism is very good at covering events, fairly good at finding patterns or trends, and not so good at looking at structure. This is where a social science approach can help. You can see how a system operates and look at the causes of the problems. Doig's hurricane story was an example of going beyond event and pattern to structure. There was a societal problem, corruption in the building-code enforcement, and it led to more hurricane damage than was necessary. Only when we think like that can we do the kind of investigative journalism we really need. ■

TWENTY-FIVE WORDS OR LESS

(and other secrets of investigative editing)

BY STEVE LOVELADY



The success of any investigative story or series rides or falls on how early the editor becomes a collaborator in the process.

By editor, I mean the lucky soul who will be doing the manuscript editing at the tail end of the process. There are four points at which he or she can become involved:

1. At the initiation of the story itself;
2. During the reporting;
3. After the reporting but before the writing;
4. And, finally, of course, in the actual line editing or, if necessary, restructuring of the manuscript.

Involving your editor in all the stages, one through four, will save a world of grief for both editor and reporter. (Among other benefits of proximity, the reporter may even drop his paranoia enough to think of the editor as a partner!) Involving your editor in stages two through four is next best. Even involving the editor just in stages three and four often works.

But involving the editor — or, if you're the big boss, calling in the cavalry — only in stage four? That's a sure-fire recipe for disaster. The magnitude of the disaster can be measured by the frequency of the following utterances: "Whose goofball idea was this in the first place?" (referring back to stage one). "The reporting has more holes in it than a presidential position paper" (referring back to stage two). "If I had known this is what you had, I would have suggested we approach it *this way* . . ." (referring back to stage three). Or all of the above.

Far too often for me, over the course of twenty-six years as an editor at newspa-

pers and five as an editor at magazines, it has been all of the above. And I like to think that this experience has taught me something. What it has taught me is that if I can have only one of the four stages, I will take stage three — the sit-down between editor and reporter, after the reporting but before the writing.

That, my friends, is where the rubber meets the road. It is where the editor finds out if the reporter has the faintest clue how to climb the mountain of documentation and notes he has assembled and emerge at the top with a sharply-worded, crisp, briskly told tale. Often, even the best reporters and most facile writers need help at this stage, and it is no wonder. After all those interviews, after weeks or months of document-digging, trail-sniffing, blind alleys, discoveries, dry holes, and amazing finds, synthesizing all that material is a daunting task.

What I like to give the reporters in this post-reporting, pre-writing session is what I call the twenty-five-words-or-less test. This is not my idea. (Few of my more effective practices are; I'll steal from anyone.) As far as I can trace, it originated with David Belasco, the former Broadway producer. Belasco spent much of his working day receiving supplicants: would-be playwrights who wanted him to produce their script, or their idea for a script. And whether the work in question was a one-act play with a single character, or a four-act play with twenty-six characters and seventeen subplots, Belasco would tell these supplicants, "If you can't write your idea on the back of my calling card, you don't have a clear idea." So I stole that, and I tell the reporter sitting in my office, "Look, I know you spent nine months and \$XXX,000 of the newspaper's money chasing this thing to ground. But I want you to sum it all up for me in twenty-five words or less. Take your time. Go walk around the block, or go out for a drink, or whatever, if you want. But then come back and give it to me in

twenty-five words or less. And you're not allowed twenty-six."

Believe it or not, this works. You, the investigative reporter, may well think your project is far too complex, far too nuanced, far too important to be reduced to a twenty-five-word nut. I can only tell you this: in the course of editing eleven Pulitzer Prize-winning stories or series and, in the magazine realm, a National Magazine Award winner and three finalists, I have yet to run across the story too complex or too nuanced or too important to be summed up in twenty-five words or less. And once the reporter-writer submits himself to that discipline — thinks it through and comes up with the twenty-five words — a magical thing can happen.

Three things, actually. Presto, the heart of the story — the incisively stated, powerful topic paragraph — has been essentially written. And, in all likelihood, a blueprint has been revealed for how to go about constructing the entire story or series. And — just as important — it will quickly become clear if there are holes in that mountain of assembled data on which you are both staking your careers.

You can't ask for much more than that.

In most investigative projects, alas, none of this happens. And that's too bad. For I believe that the reason many a worthy project in the end leaves few ripples in the pond into which the stone was thrown is not that it was poorly reported, not that it failed to deliver the goods, not that the idea was flawed; but, rather, that weeks and months of superb reporting were tossed down the drain by tedious writing and uninspired editing.

And that, in turn, is not just a failure to execute stage four well but almost certainly a breakdown in the process at stage three. For two years, I served as a Pulitzer judge, sorting through 200 to 250 entries in a given category. These stories were so important to the newspa-

per that published them that it had nominated them for the ultimate accolade. Yet I cannot tell you how many times my fellow judges and I would throw up our hands in exasperation and ask, "Can you figure out what they're driving at?" That is a terrible waste — of the reporter's effort, of the newspaper's money and newshole, and of the editor's ulcer. Gene Roberts, my boss and mentor for seventeen years at *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, used to put it this way: "Nobody ever won a Pulitzer Prize because of the first twenty or thirty column-inches of a major story. But hundreds have lost a Pulitzer because of those first twenty or thirty inches." I have no doubt he is correct.

I also have no doubt that if your story befuddles those judges, it also almost certainly befuddled your readers. And that's the real crime.

I want to touch on one other thought, and that is what happens to the story once a polished, agonized-over, and carefully crafted manuscript is delivered. The editor of that story, or series, fully as much as the reporter — no, more than the reporter — then has the task of carrying the baby safely through a woods full of dangers.

That woods is... your own organization. There are so many ways to trip up a great story — from layout and makeup that does not give the story the pride of place that the effort deserves, to timid copy-editing and lawyering that eventually blankets the story like a new snowfall blurring a rocky landscape.

At this point you are no longer the coach; you are the blocking back. The reporter is the ball carrier and the story is the football. To mix a metaphor, this is where you, the editor, have to, without declaring so — God, *never* declare so — become a guerrilla warrior protecting the project from all the inevitable internal forces that serve to blunt its impact.

Frankly, over the years, in the always-perilous process of getting an investigative story or series ready for print and, finally, into print, I have had to make more shoe-string catches to save a story from well-intentioned but ultimately wrong-headed editors — both above and below me — than from reporters themselves. But that, my friends, is another story. ■

Steve Lovelady worked at The Philadelphia Inquirer for twenty-two years, the final five as managing editor, and has worked at Time Inc. as an editor-at-large for the past five years.

DAMAGE REPORT

After the Chiquita Story

On May 3, 1998, Gannett's *The Cincinnati Enquirer* published an eighteen-page special section detailing the questionable business practices of Chiquita Brands International Inc. The articles were the result of more than a year of research by two *Enquirer* reporters, Mike Gallagher and Cameron McWhirter. On June 28 of the same year, the *Enquirer* published a six-column, page-one apology to Chiquita, effectively disowning the articles and condemning the reporting techniques of Gallagher, who had illegally accessed the voicemail of Chiquita executives. Since *CJR* last reported on these events (September/October 1998), the details of Gannett's \$14 million settlement with Chiquita have been leaked, Gallagher has been sentenced, McWhirter has moved to another paper, the former *Enquirer* editor in chief Lawrence Beaupre is entangled in his own legal struggle with Gannett, and one important source has been revealed.

THE REPORTERS:

Mike Gallagher

In its published apology, the *Enquirer* announced that Gallagher had been "terminated" for "misconduct." On September 24, 1998, he pleaded guilty to two felony counts of unlawful interception of communications and unauthorized access to computer systems in a civil suit in Cincinnati. During the legal proceedings, he avoided jail by cooperating in the prosecution of George Ventura, the former Chiquita lawyer who had provided the passwords allowing him to hear the voicemail of Chiquita executives. In exchange, Gallagher received five years probation, 200 hours of community service, and no jail time. Reportedly, he now lives in Connecticut. His lawyer was unavailable for comment.

Cameron McWhirter

McWhirter, who was not accused of any wrongdoing, emerged from the debacle relatively unscathed. He works at

another Gannett publication, *The Detroit News*, covering city hall.

THE EDITOR

Lawrence Beaupre

Following the *Enquirer's* published apology to Chiquita, the paper's former editor in chief took a corporate post at Gannett's headquarters in Arlington, Virginia. But in April, 2000, the company fired him after he filed a lawsuit against his employer, arguing, in effect, that he'd been made a scapegoat. Beaupre's suit claims that Gannett's corporate officers wrongfully say they were not aware of the series until after it was published. It avers that Philip Currie, the senior vice president/news, copy-edited each of the articles, and that Gary Watson, president of the newspaper division, was fully aware of the series as well. According to Beaupre, the misrepresentation placed blame for the series on his shoulders, damaging his credibility and his career. He is also suing Nickson, Peabody, the firm that represented Gannett in its negotiations with Chiquita, in which Gannett agreed to an apology and to pay Chiquita the reported \$14 million. Both suits are still in the discovery process in the Superior Court, District of Columbia. Beaupre is currently employed as managing editor of Scranton's *The Tribune* and *The Scranton Times*.

THE SOURCE:

George Ventura

The once prominent lawyer whose job took him to exotic locales in Central and South America was revealed by Gallagher as the source who led him to Chiquita's voicemail. On June 30, 1999, Ventura pleaded "no contest" to four misdemeanor counts of attempted unauthorized access to computer systems and was sentenced to two years of unsupervised probation and forty hours of community service. He is suing the *Enquirer* and Gannett for breaking a promise of anonymity.

— Nicholas Bender

Bender is an intern at *CJR*.

BROADCASTING

WHERE TV HAS TEETH

Television does fewer probes than in the past, but the best of them are choice



BY NEIL HICKEY

When corruption rears its ghostly head, who you gonna call?

Scambusters! For a half-century — first during the great age of tough, single-subject, hour-long investigative documentaries (CBS Reports, NBC White Paper, ABC Close-Up), and now in news-magazines and newscasts — television has exposed the iniquitous, unmasked the unscrupulous, ambushed the guilty, shamed the greedy, and censured the mendacious. An informal survey of televised investigations indicates that the form is alive and healthy at local stations around the U.S. and at the national TV networks. That's the good news. The bad news is that by most estimates there's measurably less of it than there used to be — and some of it is less "investigative" than small-bore consumer reporting.

"No other form of broadcast journalism generates more reaction, both negative and positive," Av Westin, a former executive producer of 20/20, writes in his handbook *Best Practices for Television Journalists*. It's the type of news programming viewers respond to the most, says Carl Gottlieb, deputy director of the Project for Excellence in Journalism. Focus groups tell PEJ "in no uncertain

terms" that they like the idea of crusading reporters who'll stand up for the community, go where they can't, and ask the questions they can't.

Recent examples of good work abound. A random sample:

■ KHOU, Houston: "Treading on Danger?" — Faulty Firestone tires on Ford Explorers that caused hundreds of injuries and fatalities.

■ KXLY, Spokane: "Public Funds, Private Profit" — Questionable bookkeeping and misuse of funds for a city parking garage.

■ WCPO, Cincinnati: "I-Team Stadium Investigation" — Shoddy planning and conflicts of interest in a billion-dollar plan to build two new stadiums.

■ WMAQ, Chicago: "Strip Searched at O'Hare" — Invasive searches of women by customs officials at O'Hare International Airport.

■ CBS Evening News: "Armed America" — Law enforcement agencies selling weapons, legally but unwisely, to arms dealers.

■ Dateline NBC: "The Paper Chase" — Insurance companies forging doctors' signatures, and citing non-existent databases in support of their decisions to deny claims.

■ KCBS, Los Angeles: "California's Billion Dollar Rip-Off" — Clinics billing the state of California for health care never given.

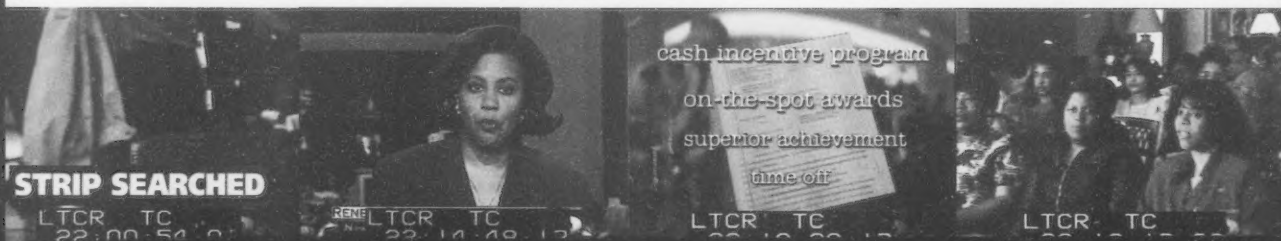
■ WFAX, Dallas: "Costly Credit: The Investigation of First USA" — Credit card customers victimized by dishonest accounting procedures.

■ KTVC, Salt Lake City: "Olympics Bribery Scandal" — Rampant corruption and bribery within the International Olympics Committee.

■ WTVF, Nashville: "Feed the Children Investigation" — Wholesale theft of food and clothing intended for the needy at a Feed the Children warehouse.

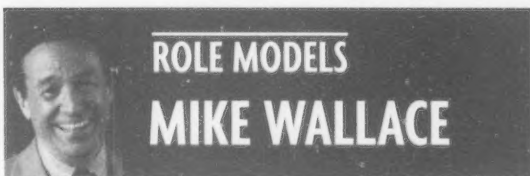
Some stations have especially mature I-teams. WMAQ's, for example, founded in 1978, has won scores of awards (including more than a dozen local Emmys, plus a Peabody and three duPonts). Over one six-month period in 1996, the team reported more than forty stories that resulted in freedom for four innocent men who'd spent eighteen years in prison. Its strip search story inspired a federal class action suit and prompted both Illinois senators to demand an expanded scrutiny of the Customs Service in all international U.S. airports. Renee Ferguson, a top investigator at the station, says that Chicago viewers have high interest in the I-team's efforts, even though most watch television merely to be entertained. "It's as if you went to the dentist's office to have your teeth whitened," Ferguson says, "and I come along and want to give you a root canal."

'STRIP SEARCHED AT O'HARE': WMAQ's Renee Ferguson, below, told how customs officials improperly searched black women



Stations and networks have no monopoly on televised investigations: one of TV's most vigorous I-teams is at *Inside Edition*, owned by the powerhouse syndicator King World Productions (*Wheel of Fortune*, *Jeopardy!*, *The Oprah Winfrey Show*). *Inside Edition* won a George Polk award in 1996 for an investigation of door-to-door insurance salespeople and how they preyed on the elderly and poor. Another looked at defective door latches on Chrysler mini-vans that allowed rear hatches to fly open in minor accidents, endangering passengers. (King World is now part of the CBS/Viacom empire, but Robert Read, who runs *Inside Edition*'s investigative unit, says he has felt no interference. "There's always a question when you get swallowed up by a big corporation," he acknowledges, "but we really are left alone.")

Investigative stories at networks and stations are not always acts of pure altruism and civic high-mindedness. The biggest and most eye-catching customarily go on the air during sweeps periods, preceded by a barrage of publicity and promotion in the effort to grab huge audiences and thus boost advertising rates. And what too often passes for investigative reporting is more properly consumer reporting, or what some TV folk call "fear and loathing reporting" — exposés of crooked auto repairmen, diet-and-exercise fallacies, harmful cosmetics, sex shops, money scams, fortune tellers, tainted meat, faulty elevators — where the object is to scare viewers into watching. Nevertheless, much investigative stuff — the trivial as well as the portentous — regularly triggers new legislation, judicial action, and regulatory alarm.



Influences? Of course Edward R. Murrow and his producer, Fred Friendly. They were separated at birth. The things Murrow did, when you think about it! The Senator Joseph McCarthy documentary, 'Harvest of Shame.' There were so many. Everybody had such respect for their work, and one felt, damn it, if I could do that kind of story . . . Talk about hitching your wagon to a star. It was really that for all of us, particularly here at CBS. Back then, there were no TV newsmagazines. No *Nightline*. When we first started *60 Minutes*, we had no idea exactly what direction it would take. Harry Reasoner and I were doing the show by ourselves, and then Harry left. 'What are we going to do?' He was the top banana. So we sat down and said, 'What can we do that isn't being done elsewhere?' Investigations. We hired quality people like producers Barry Lando and Marion Goldin. Back in those days, there was no pressure on us to go for ratings. We were on the air every other week. There was no competition, there was nothing of the same nature on at all. So as a result, we had time to develop stories, and if they didn't get an audience, what



Edward R. Murrow

Mike Wallace, born in 1918, began his television interviewing career in 1957.

the hell, we were a loss leader anyway. CBS was riding high. When we asked [CBS News executive] Bill Leonard what he expected of us, he said simply: 'Make us proud.' Not 'Make us money.' 'Make us proud.'

In Atlanta, station WSB and the *Journal-Constitution* — both owned by Cox Enterprises, Inc. — operate an extraordinarily fruitful, joint investigative unit that has mounted a series of impressive probes. Most recently, in a report that ran simultaneously on newscasts and in the paper, it scrutinized the driving and criminal records of the state's school

bus drivers and discovered a pattern of derelictions that led to a state task force, and the firing of more than forty drivers. In a study of felons in the classroom, it found that more than 5,000 teachers had criminal records, resulting in legislation that went into effect in July requiring teachers in K-12 schoolrooms to undergo criminal checks. And during November's elections, the unit identified 13,000 dead people whose names were still on the voting rolls, more than 5,000 of whom, miraculously, had actually cast votes. That caused the state legislature to start cleaning up voting records.

That kind of effort is expensive and time-consuming, and requires the solid backing of managers who must face the possibility that a prolonged investigation, tying up teams of staffers, might ultimately produce nothing. KHOU's investigative producer, David Raziq, who ran the station's prize-winning, nine-month-long investigation of the Firestone tire story, insists that thinking about investigations purely from a cost angle is shortsighted. "Our management clearly saw the advantages," he says. "All the research shows that audiences are very interested in investigative journalism." But the form is a demanding one. He calls it "extreme" journalism. "You have to be more detailed, more thorough, more fair. All of the qual-

ities that constitute good journalism have to be there, ten times more."

One good reason for such rigor is that industries and individuals under siege by TV investigators have adopted a potent counter-weapon: they hire powerful public relations and law firms to attack a report before it ever gets on the air in the effort to discredit it, or even to sink it al-

'TREADING ON DANGER' Millions of Firestone tires were recalled after KHOU's nine-month investigative effort

11 NEWS
Defenders
Investigation

Anna Werner
11 NEWS INVESTIGATIVE REPORTER

EXCLUSIVE

11

EXCLUSIVE

BRIDGESTONE/FIRESTONE

Company has "full confidence in the performance of Firestone Radial ATX tires"

12 million made

"no court or jury has ever found any deficiency in these tires"

11

EXCLUSIVE

FORD MOTOR COMPANY

Tread separation accidents "clearly resulted from driver error"

Accidents are "isolated" incidents

11

WALLACE: DINI EPSTEIN/CBS; MURROW: BETTMANN/COMBIS

ROLE MODELS

PAM ZEKMAN



"My role models are two reporters at the *Chicago Tribune* when I was on the investigative task force there before coming to WBBM: Bill Jones and George Bliss, both Pulitzer Prize winners. I learned from both of them. They had a real commitment to doing the kinds of stories that really affect people. They both had a tremendous social conscience and a low outrage threshold, an eye for creative ideas, for how to get difficult stories done. Also, incredible energy and patience to work on these stories over the long haul. Both had a great ability to see the big picture and then figure out how to illustrate it with examples. Bill Jones had an extraordinary writ-

ing ability and a talent for pulling massive amounts of information together in ways that made it interesting. I started out at the City News Bureau in Chicago and went to the *Tribune* at a time when they were forming their first task force. I was at the right place at the right time because they wanted a woman on the team. I've basically been doing that kind of team reporting ever since — ten years in newspapers and twenty years here at WBBM. Every story brings some new challenge."

Pam Zekman has won two Peabodys, ten local Emmys, and two duPont-Columbia awards at WBBM, and shared two Pulitzers for investigative work in print.

together. Bill Moyers learned that in 1992 while doing a documentary for *Frontline* on pesticide residue in children's food. The agricultural chemical industry hired the Washington p.r. firm Porter Novelli, Inc., to mount a spin campaign. Quickly, television reviewers and editorial page editors were bombarded with mail and press releases. "We've just read a transcript of the upcoming episode of *Frontline* [and] are writing to express our deep concern," said one letter. A scathing *Wall Street Journal* op-ed piece on the morning after the program aired was headlined: FRONTLINE PERPETUATES PESTICIDES MYTHS. PBS got 4,500 pieces of mail accusing Moyers and company of employing junk science to panic the public about agricultural chemicals. Many TV critics, under the influence of the prodigious p.r. campaign, simply parroted the industry's views. In the end, Moyers's program withstood all attacks on its accuracy, but its effect was partially smothered by the Porter Novelli campaign.

"That's why you don't get much investigation reporting on television anymore," Moyers says. "The networks don't want the headaches. I spend as much time preparing for these p.r. attacks as I do producing the documentary." Another Moyers exposé that aired in late March, called "Trade Secrets" and based on unpublished documents, revealed forty years of efforts by the chemical industry to limit regu-

lation of toxic chemicals, during which period the manufacturers withheld vital information from workers, the government, and the media. In the days and weeks before the broadcast, the American Chemistry Council attacked it in the press for "journalistic



ROLE MODELS

BRIAN ROSS

"I grew up in suburban Chicago. The fifties and sixties were my formative years. What interested me were the aggressive reporters then on the *Chicago Daily News* and the *Sun-Times* — that Chicago school of no-holds-barred journalism that made me feel this would really be exciting to do. Sandy Smith was a reporter on the *Sun-Times* who went after mob figures and others, and later was a reporter at *Time*. I was steeped in that style of reporting. To grow up as a teenager interested in journalism and to read those papers every day, and to learn how they did what they were doing — it was an exciting time for me."

Brian Ross is chief investigative correspondent for ABC News.

malpractice," and even created a Web site to purvey the chemical industry's opposition.

"It happens all the time," agrees the ABC News investigations specialist Brian Ross. "The big targets have learned to fight back. Every time we've done a story on a major corporation or industry, they fire up in a big way with all kinds of campaigns to undermine it." A recent Ross investigation described private seminars for federal judges — often at fancy golf resorts — sponsored by huge corporations, at which conservative, pro-business speakers suggest to the jurists how they should rule on environmental and other public issues that come before them. Well before the broadcast went on the air, ABC News got a rocket from the Washington lobbying firm Patton Boggs denouncing the program's conclusions and calling it poor journalism.

Ross chuckles at the recollection. "It's almost become a standard to know if you're going after the right people," he says. "You're sure you've hit a nerve when you hear from them — the letters and the threats from lawyers. If you don't hear from them, you figure you must have done something wrong." TV news organizations usually win lawsuits attempting prior restraint, but fighting them is expensive and time-consuming, and can deter or delay an investigation. Most conspicuous example: CBS's famous 1995 decision to bump a 60 Minutes probe of the tobacco industry.

'TRADE SECRETS': Bill Moyers reported on the chemical industry's vigorous efforts to limit regulation of toxic substances



**TRADE
SECRETS**
A MOYERS REPORT

WFLA

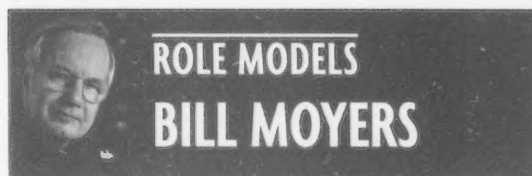
(Says Mike Wallace: "That was the only time we ever had any pressure from management.")

In 1998, Ross felt management's mailed fist after he finished work on an investigation of pedophilia and lax security at theme parks, including Walt Disney World, owned by ABC News's parent company. David Westin, the network's news president, killed the segment, resulting in a shouting match between him and Ross during which the reporter came to the brink of quitting. An ABC News staffer at the time reportedly said that Ross had "tested the outer boundaries of reporting on Disney and found them."

Such tensions between TV investigators and their bosses are the inevitable byproduct of the wave of consolidations that swept the industry starting in the mid-1980s. Says Av Westin: "Michael Eisner, Jack Welch, Mel Karmazin, and Rupert Murdoch need never worry that a story done by their news divisions is going to rip the lid off their company, because the guys down below are not going to OK it. The executive producer of *20/20* will never again approve a story investigating Disney. Why should he?"

Anyway, at most news organizations, serious muckraking "has never been the favorite relative at the table," says the veteran journalist Sydney Schanberg. "It would be an astounding revelation if top managers ever instructed their networks, 'Hey, let's do more investigative reporting.' Or if Jack Welch ordered, 'Let's do more on PCBs in the Hudson River.'"

At the local level, television stations have produced fewer investigations in recent years, according to the Project for Excellence in Journalism. Over the last three years, says PEJ's Gottlieb, "what we're seeing is that the whole range of enterprising reporting is going away." The reason? Money. Investigations are often speculative, and always expensive,



"I've admired Donald L. Barlett and James B. Steele for a long time. They were at *The Philadelphia Inquirer* for many years, and did major takeouts that kept the best tradition of journalism alive. They're at *Time* now [since 1997]. Like I. F. Stone, they got their material from the documents; they learned how to connect the dots. I admired Stone even though, when I was [in President Johnson's administration], he was always writing about us. He was finding out things that even I, as press secretary in the White House, couldn't find out."

Bill Moyers's most recent investigation was the March 26 "Trade Secrets," an exposé of the chemical industry.



MARIO RUZ

like drilling for oil. It's far cheaper and more efficient for a TV newsroom to fill its airtime with live stand-ups and video clips of breaking news derived from the police scanner.

Fewer than 20 percent of members of IRE, the University of Missouri-based Investigative Reporters and Editors, are broadcasters, and the TV members have been complaining over the last two years — according to Brant Houston, the group's executive director — about their stations' reluctance to take the risks (legal, advertising) and to provide airtime. Nonetheless, he says, the contest entries arriving at IRE show that "no matter how bad the conditions, some reporters are finding ways to do terrific stories." Among this year's winners: "First Casualty," a *60 Minutes* II report on the failure of U.S. forces to mount a rescue mission for a Navy pilot downed in Iraq — who may still

be alive there, ten years after the event; and "Who's Policing the Police?," an investigation by Nashville's WTVF into improper relationships between Nashville police and night club owners, strip-club operators, convicted gamblers, and others.

In September at its annual convention, the Radio-Television News Directors Association will hand out no fewer than twenty-two Edward R. Murrow Awards for investigative reports to stations large and small: San Diego's XETV, Denver's KCNC, Austin's KVUE, Raleigh's WRAL, Baton Rouge's WAFF, Philadelphia's WTXF.

At WCBS in New York, a station plagued for years by ratings woes, Joel Cheatwood, the news director, launched a four-person I-team in February as part of a solution. "This is a station that desperately needs to reconnect with its viewers,"

he says, "and the only way we can do that is through good, strong local reporting that cuts through the headlines of the day, which everybody is offering, and gets to the issues and stories we can enterprise, and have some ownership in." Investigative reporting, which he believes is beginning to stage a comeback at local stations, is "one of the absolute best ways to drive the station's roots into the community," Cheatwood says. Over the last ten years, however, he has observed many stations "folding the investigative tent," declaring they can't afford to do it anymore because of mounting legal fees and budget cutbacks. Cheatwood, who also wears the title of news executive vice-president for CBS's thirty-five owned stations, says he is reminding those outlets of the value of strong localism in courting audiences. "Nothing does that quite like investigative reporting."

'ARMED AMERICA': CBS News discovered that many law enforcement agencies unwisely sell weapons to arms dealers

Armed America

POLICE GUNS: CRIMES

1990-1998

- 293 homicides
- 301 assaults
- 279 drug-related

SUING GUN MAKERS

San Francisco, Los Angeles, New Orleans, Miami, Chicago, St. Louis, Cincinnati, Atlanta, Detroit, Boston, Newark, Cleveland

WEAPONS BOUGHT FROM LAW ENFORCEMENT

- 112 Handguns
- 194 Shotguns & Rifles
- 20 Assault Weapons
- AR-15

HIDDEN CAMERAS

One beneficiary of the networks' investigative efforts is Mitchell Wagenberg, boss of a unique, fifteen-year-old Manhattan company called streetTVision Remote, which hires out to ABC, CBS, and NBC to perform undercover work. The publicity-averse Wagenberg and his team ("It is not in my interest to have stories done on my company") design, build, and operate hidden cameras and microphones for network investigations. In his bag of tricks: tiny cameras concealed in shirt buttons, in eyeglasses, necklaces, neckties, ballpoint pens, and one that lurks in a reporter's hair. Wagenberg often is privy to the investigations all three networks are working on, but maintains an impenetrable discretion. ("Macy's doesn't tell Gimbel's," he explains.) At times he has worked on the same story for two networks simultaneously, without either one knowing of his efforts for the other.

For a *60 Minutes* investigation of a corrupt insurance executive who lived in affluent Greenwich, Connecticut, Wagenberg was assigned to capture the elusive man's image on videotape. A surveillance van was impractical because local police in that rich community would have chased the vehicle off. Solution: three joggers and three bicyclists — each wearing hidden cameras and mikes — circled the house for six days before the quarry pulled out of his driveway. A bike-riding team member approached the

car, knocked on the window, and requested directions to a nearby town. The man complied, and, without his knowing it, was videotaped and audio-recorded for national television.

Use of hidden cameras, actually, has declined ever since ABC News lost the 1997 Food Lion case, in which undercover reporters lied about their identity to gain access for a covert story on unsafe meat-handling practices. TV news executives think twice now before authorizing these spycam stories, and indeed the technique has often been misused for melodramatic effect. Spycamming is the quintessential invasion of privacy and leads to hostility, resentment, and lawsuits. To the person with a hammer (as someone has noted) the whole world looks like a nail. To a spycam operator, almost everybody looks guilty of something.

But some investigations need hidden cameras, even though courts in recent years have punished reporters who misrepresent their identity, or trespass to get a story. Before Food Lion, says Lucy Dalglish, executive director of the Reporters Committee for Freedom of the Press, hidden cameras were used way too much. Nonetheless, she feels, courts should be more flexible in recognizing that journalists need a bit more wiggle room, within the law, to conduct their probes.

— N.H.

At the networks, too, fewer major investigations have received the green light in recent years. "It's a question of time, money, and the ratings business," Mike Wallace says. The newsmagazines are doing "damned little" substantial investigation, and it's "much softer than it used to be." One big problem, Wallace adds, is that it's not easy to find good investigative reporters and producers who know how to do the often-gruelling trench work. Sydney Schanberg thinks the networks do too much "quick hit stuff," and then move on. "I always consider that investigative reporting is wasted unless you keep going back to the story and peeling away more layers of the onion." Says Seymour Hersh: "In all fairness to the networks, investigative journalism is hard. When television does it right, though, it's very powerful. But it doesn't seem to be a big priority." Both television and print, however, are too often late to the party, says Bob Woodward of *The Washington Post*. "Why didn't we find out about Iran-Contra earlier?" he asks. "Why was it

some Beirut magazine that pulled the string on that one? The classic case is the savings and loan crisis of the 1980s. Why didn't we get to the bottom of the Clinton scandal earlier? We now know that illegal behavior in the Nixon administration preceded Watergate. Where were we?" Ironically, the TV investigations most people remember are the ones that backfired spectacularly: CNN's "Operation Tailwind" report, and *Dateline's* famous exploding truck segment.

Woodward, ironically, isn't fond of the term "investigative reporting" because it implies, in most instances, the discovery of wrongdoing. He prefers "in-depth." Some of the best investigative reporting is more properly in-depth reporting, he believes, because it's aimed at "getting to the bottom of what really happened," which might not be felonious. Twenty years ago, he co-authored a book on the Supreme Court which uncovered no malefactions. "No one was fired, no one resigned, no one went to jail. But the book described in depth how the institution works."

A few veteran newsfolk feel that TV investigations shouldn't be done at all, that too often they're initiated by somebody with an ax to grind who throws a brown envelope over the transom. "I don't like investigative reporters," writes Reese Schonfeld, the founding president of CNN, in his memoir *Me and Ted Against the World*. "For the most part, investigative units just provide a convenient mail drop for whistle-blowers or malcontents to drop their droppings."

But television's scambusters are here to stay. Lincoln Steffens and Ida Tarbell never imagined the tools and techniques — spycams, computers, Freedom of Information searches — that now make muckraking so potent a form of journalism. At their best, television's tireless, dauntless investigators — as they venture forth to slay the dragons of infamy, knavery, and vice — render the society a better place. ■

Neil Hickey is *CJR's* editor at large.

'THE PAPER CHASE': *Dateline* NBC probed insurance companies' unethical practices in denying medical claims



It's now 92 Pulitzers for newspapers contributing to the Los Angeles Times- Washington Post News Service.



David Willman, a veteran reporter in the Washington bureau of the Los Angeles Times, won the investigative reporting Pulitzer for his pieces on Food and Drug Administration approval of seven unsafe prescription drugs. The medications are suspected of causing the deaths of more than 1,000 patients. Willman's two-year examination of the FDA disclosed that the agency had approved the drugs (including a heartburn medicine, a diet pill and a painkiller) "while disregarding danger signs or blunt warnings from its own specialists." The FDA was then "slow to seek withdrawals" of the drugs, even after having received "reports of significant harm to patients." The Pulitzer Prize Board called Willman's work a "pioneering exposé," but his stories offered a strong analytical component as well. The board also cited his "analysis of the policy reforms that had reduced the agency's effectiveness."



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THE EASY PART

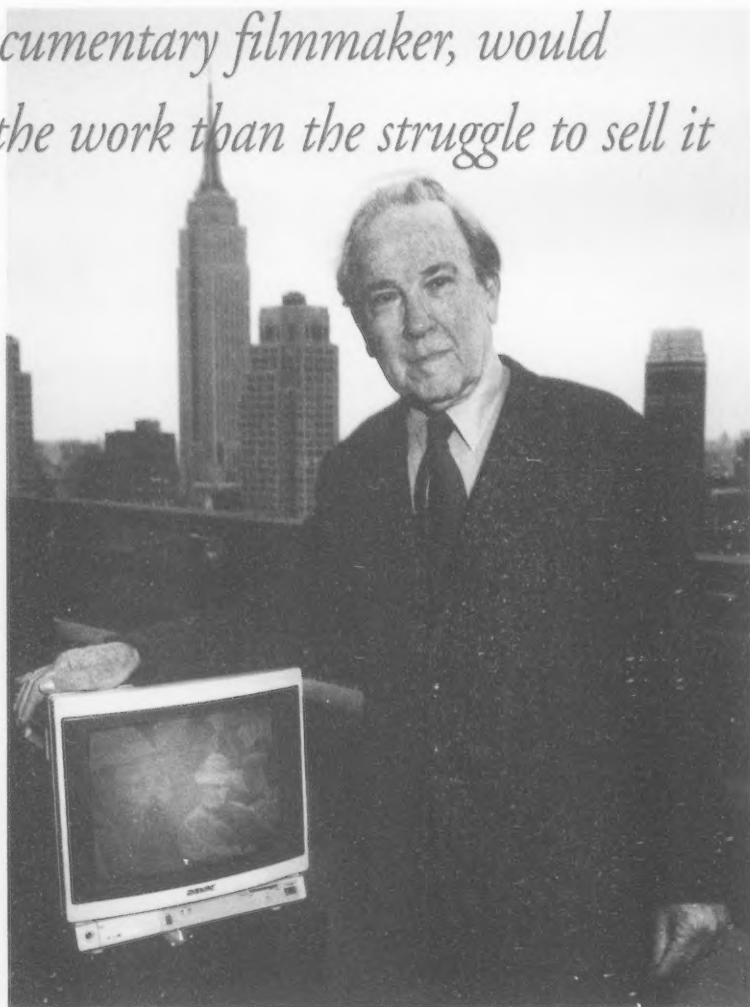
Robert Richter, documentary filmmaker, would rather talk about the work than the struggle to sell it

BY LAUREN JANIS

Framed awards elbow each other for space on his office wall. More are stacked in piles on a high shelf. Three duPonts, three Academy Award nominations, film festival prizes, Emmys, and a Peabody, too. He has made about fifty films that have aired on PBS, CBS, NBC, and ABC. He has worked with the big names: Murrow, Friendly, Cronkite. He has an idea for a new film, complete with witnesses, experts, and exclusive interviews. But so far he doesn't have the funding, the interest, or the outlets to air it. He has been looking for two years. To Robert Richter, an independent investigative documentary filmmaker, this is nothing new.

For over thirty years Richter has been tackling the trio of challenges that independent documentary makers face — funding, production, and distribution. When asked how he does it, Richter laughs and points to a photograph on the wall that shows him wearing six hats at once. "You have to be optimistic," he says. He sits in his sunny, thirty-second-floor office on West Forty-second Street. Behind him, his computer peers over his shoulder as if looking for his wallet. The screen is open to a chart labeled "Cash Flow Report." Richter, his back squarely turned to his monitor, clearly prefers to talk about his films rather than his steady quest for funding. When it comes to producing investigative documentaries, the actual filmmaking almost seems to be the easy part.

Richter grew up in New York City and became a journalist in 1957. He worked for public radio in Oregon, and then wrote about the Pacific Northwest for *The New York Times*. It was around that time that he saw some documentaries produced by Edward R. Murrow and Fred Friendly for



CBS Reports. "I thought, that's what I want to do," he recalls. "I set my target on working for the Murrow/Friendly unit." By 1963, Richter was a producer for *CBS Reports*. He stayed for five years, producing programs on a range of topics, from "Bulldozed America," about the destruction of natural resources, to "Tiger in the Senate," about Robert F. Kennedy's senatorial run.

Then Richter went solo. Seeking more editorial control, he started Richter Productions, in 1968. His initial focus was on environmental issues, and he began mak-

ing films for PBS's *NOVA*. "Incident at Brown's Ferry" exposed how an Alabama nuclear power plant — the largest in the world — suffered a seven-hour fire, and came frighteningly close to becoming a major public disaster. "Brown's Ferry" won Richter his first duPont in 1977.

Next came "A Plague on Our Children," which explored how pesticides and industrial waste products affected communities. "I will never forget a little boy who spoke to the New York State Health Commission in front of a crowd of a thousand people,"

Richter remembers. "He said, 'Mr. Commissioner, I just want to know, will I grow up to be a normal man?' And people cried because they were concerned about the use of various poisons." That was duPont number two.

"Pesticides for Export Only" and "Pharmaceuticals for Export Only," a two-part series, examined how products banned in the U.S. were exported to third-world countries without adequate health warnings. For "Pesticides," Richter traveled to Ghana, Malaysia, Kenya, Bangladesh, Latin America, and Central America, documenting how farm workers were exposed to dangerous chemicals, and showing how those poisons got back to the U.S. One sobering sequence followed a crop of bananas as they were sprayed with banned pesticides in Costa Rica, shipped to the U.S., and delivered into the hands of a baby in a supermarket, who sat in a shopping cart, gumming the unpeeled fruit. "I got another duPont for those films," Richter says.

He's seventy-one, but when he talks about his work, he speaks with the enthusiasm of a rookie shortstop describing his first major league game. He recalls conversations and scenes verbatim, caught up in the story as if pitching it for the first time. Did he tell you yet about "Do Not Enter — The Visa War Against Ideas," he asks, about a freedom of speech law that denies foreigners entry into the U.S.? Or how about "Hungry for Profit," which explores the agribusiness industry? Or "Father Roy: Inside the School of Assassins," about the U.S. Army's School of the Americas, a school in Fort Benning, Georgia, that trained Latin American soldiers who returned to their own countries and joined military death squads? As Richter talks, one film weaving into the next, his bright eyes shining behind his brown-rimmed, round glasses, he almost makes independent filmmaking sound easy. It's not.

Being an investigative documentary filmmaker is not like reporting in-depth articles for a newspaper or producing sleek segments for *60 Minutes*. There are very few staff positions for investigative documentary filmmakers, and very few places to broadcast the work. They must be independent and tireless, constantly juggling multiple projects and responsibilities — tapping into grants, relatives, friends, and savings accounts to get funding; walking around with flyers advertising screenings or selling videos out of living rooms to get distribution.

The average cost of a one-hour documentary is about \$600,000 to \$700,000.

This is money that a filmmaker must either raise or pull from his own reluctant pocket. Days are spent writing grant proposals to foundations and church groups. While waiting for the funding, filmmakers continue to research, investigate, and shoot film. This means they can work on a project for months and years without being paid a nickel. Much must be done on faith — faith that money will come in to complete the project; faith that someone will want to put it on the air.

The situation is getting tougher. In 1984, Richter was quoted in a *New York Times* article as saying that he spent up to 25 percent of his time on fundraising. Now that figure is up to 50 percent, he says. Less money is available from public sources. And more filmmakers are seeking funding. New technology allows anyone with a video camera to make a documentary. They all want money. "A number of years ago, there were five hundred people going to fifty places," says Richter. "Now there are five thousand going to the same fifty."

It's no easier on the distribution side. Television is the best way to reach the largest audience, yet there are few places in the television spectrum for investigative documentaries, beyond a sassy ten-minute slice. Cable television initially looked promising, with its many new networks and programming hours to fill. But in the last few years, cable documentaries have become less intellectual and more generic, usually focussing on sex, murder, celebrities, or all three. While HBO airs some serious documentaries, it has also had success with series such as "G-String Divas." The Discovery Channel, the History Channel, and A & E Biography looked like possibilities until they began financing their own documentaries, creating cookie-cutter segments that are cheaper than buying outside films.

The options are limited. "There's only one *Frontline*, there's only one *NOVA*, there's only one *POV*," says Richter. *Frontline* is the place to be, airing serious, in-depth documentaries every week. Yet even with experience, Academy Award nominations, and three duPonts, Richter has never made it to *Frontline*. "It's a very closed circle," he says. "I've tried to penetrate a few times, but it's not easy." *Frontline* airs eighteen new programs a year. Most of those slots are filled by a group of ten to twelve regular filmmakers, with perhaps only two slots open to outsiders. For those two slots, *Frontline* receives up to 900 proposals.

If American television fails, documentary filmmakers can look to film festivals

or hope for a theatrical release, though investigative documentaries will not likely rival *Gladiator* any time soon. Or they can self-distribute, selling films to universities or community groups, one video tape at a time. Richter has done all of that. He has also gone global. "Money Lenders," a film about the impact of the World Bank and the IMF on developing countries, was distributed in Western Europe, Latin America, and the Middle East. International sales from that movie paid his rent and his assistant for two years, though U.S. outlets had no interest.

Richter has a head full of films that were never made, because of lack of funding or broadcast interest. But he hates to give up on them. They stick in his head like burrs. "I've invested my time and money and passion and commitment," he says. "Sometimes I just dig my heels in and say this is such a good idea, I'm just not going to give in."

Tenacity might be what makes this business possible. "It's like the priesthood, it's a calling," Richter says. "You have to want to do it. Or as Fred Friendly used to say, 'You have to have fire in the belly.' If you don't, better not get into it." Richter still has the fire.

For two years Richter has been researching a film on Operation Condor, the 1970s conspiracy involving six Latin American countries to neutralize their left-wing opponents around the world using torture and murder. The operation — which has been linked to the former Chilean dictator Augusto Pinochet and, more recently, the CIA — has been implicated in the deaths of Orlando Letelier, the former Chilean foreign minister, and his colleague Ronni Moffitt, who were assassinated by a car bomb in Washington, D.C., in 1976. Richter has contacts, knows victims who survived, and says he has documented CIA links. Springing out of his chair, Richter pulls a clipping off his wall from *The New York Times*, dated March 6, and reads a headline: NEW FILES TIE U.S. TO DEATHS OF LATIN LEFTISTS IN 1970S. "More and more stuff keeps coming out," he says excitedly. "Some of it I knew before it came out."

Richter needs \$25,000 to start filming. He has raised none. He continues to track the story, develop contacts, write out grant proposals, and may even re-send his pitch to *Frontline*. "There may be a time when I put *Condor* on the back burner," he says. (But not yet.) ■

Lauren Janis is CJR's assistant editor.

ARE WATCHDOGS AN ENDANGERED SPECIES?

Crucial as they are, their existence isn't guaranteed

BY BILL KOVACH AND
TOM ROSENSTIEL



In 1964 the Pulitzer Prize went to *The Philadelphia Bulletin* in a new reporting category. The award honored the *Bulletin* for reporting that police officers in that city were

running a numbers racket right out of their station house, and it presaged a new wave of scrutiny of police corruption in American cities. The award had one other significance as well. It marked formal recognition by the print establishment of a new era in American journalism.

The new Pulitzer category was first called Local Investigative Specialized Reporting, shortened to Investigative Reporting in 1985. The newspaper executives from around the country who ran the Pulitzer were putting new emphasis on the role of the press as activist, reformer, and exposé. In doing so, the journalism establishment was acknowledging the work of a new generation of journalists. Reporters like Wallace Turner and William Lambert in Portland and George Bliss in Chicago were reviving a tradition of pursuing and exposing corruption that had largely been absent from reporting during World War II and the years immediately following. Eight years later, Bob Woodward and Carl Bernstein would suddenly gain celebrity and sex appeal and further redefine the image of the profession.

All of journalism was changed with Watergate, especially Washington jour-

nalism. A.M. Rosenthal, executive editor of *The New York Times*, was so disturbed by the way *The Washington Post* dominated the story that he ordered a reorganization of his newspaper's Washington bureau to create a formal team of investigative reporters. CBS News launched *60 Minutes*, which often does investigative stories and which became the most successful news program network TV ever produced. Local television news, not to be left out, was soon awash in investigative teams — or “I-Teams” — of its own.

Some old-timers began to grumble. Investigative reporting, they harumphed, was little more than a two-dollar word for good reporting. In the end, all reporting is investigative. The critics had a point. What the Pulitzer Prize board formally recognized in 1964 had been, in fact, more than two hundred years in development.

Investigative reporting's roots were firmly established in the very first periodicals, in the earliest notions of the meaning of a free press and the First Amendment, and in the motivation of journalists throughout the profession's history in the U.S. These roots are so strong, they form a fundamental principle: Journalists must serve as an independent monitor of power.

When print periodicals first emerged from the coffeehouses in England in the seventeenth century, they saw their role as investigatory. *The Parliament Scout*, which began publication in 1643, “suggested something new in journalism — the necessity of making an effort to search out and discover the news.” The next year a publication calling itself *The Spie* promised readers that it planned on

“discovering the usual cheats in the great game of the Kingdome. For that we would have to go undercover.”

These early efforts at investigative work became part of the reason the press was granted its constitutional freedom. It was the watchdog role that made journalism, in James Madison's phrase, “a bulwark of liberty,” just as truth, in the case of John Peter Zenger, became the ultimate defense of the press. And in the years to come, as conflict between a protected press and government institutions increased, it was this watchdog role that the Supreme Court fell back on time and again to reaffirm the press's central role in American society. With support from state and federal legislatures during the 1960s and 1970s, the press gained greater access through the Freedom of Information Act and so-called sunshine laws, which provided public access to many documents and activities of the government.

Journalists continue to see the watchdog role as central to their work. Yet its existence is not guaranteed, and in some ways its health is threatened.

At the turn of the century, the Chicago journalist and humorist Finley Peter Dunne translated the watchdog principle to mean “comfort the afflicted and afflict the comfortable.” Dunne was half kidding, but the maxim has stuck. Unfortunately, the notion that the press is there to afflict the comfortable and comfort the afflicted misconstrues the meaning of the watchdog role and gives it a liberal cast, but the concept is deeper and more nuanced than the literal sense of afflicting or comforting would suggest. As history shows, it more properly

means watching over the powerful few in society on behalf of the many to guard against tyranny.

The purpose of the watchdog role also extends beyond simply making the management and execution of power transparent, to making known and understood the effects of that power. This logically implies that the press should report on powerful institutions that are working effectively, as well as those that are not. How can the press purport to monitor the powerful if it does not illustrate successes as well as failures? Endless criticisms lose meaning, and the public has no basis for judging good from bad.

Like a theme in a Bach fugue, investigative reporting has swelled and subsided through the history of journalism in the U.S. As it has matured, three main forms can be identified:

■ **Original Investigative Reporting:** reporters themselves uncovering and documenting activities that have been previously unknown to the public, usually via such tools as basic shoe-leather, public records, informants, and even, in special circumstances, undercover work or surreptitious monitoring of activities.

■ **Interpretative Investigative Reporting.** This form often involves the same original enterprise skills but takes the interpretation to a different level. It usually involves more complex issues or sets of facts than a classic exposé, and reveals a new way of looking at something as well as new information about it. One early example is publication in *The New York Times* of the Pentagon Papers in 1971. Reporter Neil Sheehan went to great lengths to track down a copy of the "papers," a secret study of American involvement in Vietnam written by the government. Then a team of reporters and editors expert in foreign policy and the Vietnam war interpreted and organized the documents into a dramatic ac-



ROLE MODELS SEYMOUR HERSH

"I.F. Stone was an influence for a lot of people who came along in the sixties because he took published documents and made something out of them. If there's any message he taught me, it's: you can't write before you read. You've got to read the documents, the transcripts of hearings, and so forth. Stone is somewhat tainted now in some people's minds. They like to think of him as some crazy lefty, but he wasn't. He was certainly a liberal. He took press statements that the government put out and read every one of them. I remember in 1966 or thereabouts, the U.S. forces in Vietnam announced a three-day cease fire; the U.S. would shut down its operations in Vietnam for three days, and so would the other side. What I.F. Stone discovered by reading all of the logistical reports was that in those three days, we quadrupled the amount of military supplies flowing into the Saigon airport. So instead of having forty flights a day, we had hundreds with supplies and arms. So in effect, we cheated very significantly. Stone got that by reading all the logistical reports. The net effect was that it raised questions about our integrity. The Vietnam war itself was a big influence. It was in your face. We do not remember how accepted that war was. Before Watergate, going after a president, a presidential policy, just wasn't done. Every war was assumed to be a just war."



I.F. Stone

"Harrison Salisbury was a role model. Homer Bigart was a role model. David Halberstam was a role model. In the early 60s when those guys were pounding away in Saigon, I was a kid reporter in Chicago. *The New York Times* wasn't so easy to get. I had to walk to the sole downtown newspaper kiosk, on Randolph Street, that sold it. I'd walk a mile out of my way to get a *Times* early in the morning. So I was very influenced by the early Vietnam correspondents, most of them at the *Times*. They were a very powerful influence on me."

Seymour Hersh's eighth book, Against All Enemies, is an investigation of gulf war syndrome.



Harrison Salisbury

count of public deception. Without this synthesis and interpretation, the Pentagon Papers would have meant little to most of the public.

■ **Reporting on Investigations.** In this case the reporting develops from the discovery or leak of information from an official investigation already under way. Increasingly common, it is a staple of journalism in Washington, a city where the government often talks to itself through the press. But reporting on investigations is often found wherever official investigators are at work. Most of the reporting on President Clinton's affair with Monica Lewinsky was actually reporting on the investigation of Independent Prosecutor Kenneth Starr's office, augmented by counterinformation leaked by the White House or lawyers for those going before the grand jury. In contrast, most of the work on Watergate, especially in the early critical months, was original investigative work.

The New York Times coverage of the government's investigation of the Los Alamos scientist Wen Ho Lee provides a dramatic example of the damage that can be done to the credibility of a news organization when reporting on investigations. Relying on sources inside the investigation of Lee, the *Times* had for weeks led the way in reporting on the strength of the government's espionage case against the scientist. But when the government's case dramatically collapsed, the *Times* embarked on a review of its coverage, which had showcased some of the purported evidence that was then abandoned when the case reached the courtroom. In an extraordinary notice "From the Editors" published last September 26, the *Times* admitted to lapses in its coverage of the story including this one: "Passages of some articles . . . posed a problem of tone. In place of a tone of journalistic detachment from our sources, we occasionally used language that adopted the sense of alarm that was contained in official reports and was being voiced to us by investigators . . ."

Reporting on investigations has proliferated since the 1970s. In part, this is because the number of

Public Support for the Watchdogs Is Fading

BY ANDREW KOHUT



Andrew Kohut, director of the Pew Research Center for the People and the Press, writes regularly for *CJR* about public attitudes toward the media.

The biggest gap between the people and the press is over the way news media play their watchdog role. Almost all journalists are sure that media scrutiny of politicians is worth the effort because it prevents wrongdoing. But the percentage of Americans thinking that press criticism impedes political leaders from doing their jobs has increased from 17 percent in 1985 to as much as 31 percent in 1999, when the public

was especially angry over the media's handling of the Lewinsky scandal. In the center's most recent survey, 25 percent subscribe to that view, while the number saying they value the press's watchdog role has fallen to 60 percent from 67 percent in 1985. Many Americans see an ill-mannered watchdog that barks too often — one that is driven by its own interests rather than by a desire to protect the public interest.

News audiences now question not only the way the press does its job, but also its basic values. This was not the case when I first began doing in-depth surveys about the media fifteen years ago. Back then I was commissioned by the Times Mirror Company to get to the bottom of the newly minted press "credibility crisis." We found the American public roundly critical of the way the press did its job: too sensational, too pushy, too rude, too uncaring about people it covers, said our respondents, both in focus groups and in extensive nationwide polling.

Major news organizations, however, were still credible to the overwhelming majority of Americans; most saw them as moral, professional, and caring about the interests of the country. There was greater public regard for the watchdog role. We concluded that the people excused some press excesses because they valued media vigilance. The many polls we have taken since have documented

how much the news media's public standing has slipped.

Americans are now more critical of press behavior than they were in the mid-1980s. The percentage who feel that journalists are insensitive and over-aggressive is ever higher. In 1985, 35 percent thought that news organizations cared about people they cover. That figure fell to 21 percent by 1999. The number who believe the press usually gets the facts straight slipped from a modest 55 percent in 1985 to a mere 37 percent in more recent surveys.

All bad news. But the news about the public's loss of respect for the basic values of the news media is worse. In 1985 the press was seen as "moral" rather than

of public figures, 24 percent feel the media report only the facts, while a huge 72 percent believe news organizations are driving the controversy rather than simply covering the story.

The public views extensive coverage of scandal in high places as pandering to partisan and tabloid audiences rather than as attempts to protect the public interest. They see audience- and career-building, where the press would have them see crusading journalism.

Little wonder that the credibility of major news organizations has eroded. In 1985 only one in seven said they disbelieved major news organizations. Currently as many as one in four give the mainstream news media, such as the broadcast networks, low believability ratings.

For a long time journalists themselves sharply disagreed with the public's criticisms of the way the media carry out their watchdog responsibilities. But more recently they have come closer to the public's point of view. A 1999 survey found journalists still valuing the press watchdog role. Yet majorities in local news organizations agreed with the people that the media often drive the story — not just report it — in the coverage of personal lives and wrongdoing in high places. Members of the national media in the survey were divided on the question, but more of them held the public's opinion than in previous polls.

Over the last two decades, it's clear that media coverage of the troubles of Gary Hart, Marion Barry, Zoe Baird, Kimba Wood, Dan Rostenkowski, Jim Bakker, the Keating five, John Tower, Jim Wright, Bob Livingston, Hillary Clinton, and of course, Bill Clinton, have made an unfavorable impression on news audiences. It's fair to say that most Americans don't want the press to ignore stories involving such figures, but rather to pursue them without the excessiveness, frequent lack of fairness, and increasingly transparent exploitation. ■

*Andrew Kohut, director of the Pew Research Center for the People and the Press, writes regularly for *CJR* about public attitudes toward the media.*

Press and Public Opinion of the Watchdog Role...

	Worth It PERCENT	Gets in the Way Too Much PERCENT
NATIONAL PRESS		
February 1999	87	5
General Public:		
March 2001	60	25
February 1999	58	31
February 1998	55	39
February 1997	56	32
January 1994	66	24
August 1989	68	23
December 1986	60	26
June 1985	67	17

"immoral" by 54 percent to 13 percent. In the most recent survey, as many see the news media as immoral as moral — 40 percent to 38 percent. Similarly, there has been a threefold increase in those who say major news organizations lack professionalism, from 11 percent to 32 percent. And today, Americans are divided — 45 percent to 38 percent — over whether the news media protect or hurt democracy. In 1985, the public saw the press as a caretaker of democratic values by a two-to-one margin.

The way the press plays its watchdog role is central to these shifts in opinion. The media make the news rather than just report it, say most Americans. In covering personal and ethical behavior

official investigations has grown; in part, it is because after Watergate federal and state governments passed new ethics laws and created special offices to monitor government behavior. But it also has spread because over time journalists have come to depend on unidentified sources to the point where the practice has become a concern for both journalists and a suspicious public.

And thus it is a form of reporting full of unacknowledged risks. For one thing, the value of this kind of reporting is largely dependent on the rigor and skepticism of the reporter involved. The reporter grants the interview subject a powerful forum in which to air an allegation or float a suggestion without public accountability. The reporters here are usually privy to only part of the investigation, rather than in charge of it. The chance of being used by investigatory sources is high. Rather than a watchdog of powerful institutions, the press is vulnerable to being their tool. Reporting on investigations requires enormous due diligence. Paradoxically, some news outlets often think just the opposite — that they can more freely report the suspicions or allegations because they are quoting official sources rather than carrying out the investigation themselves.

In the ebb and flow of the watchdog role over the last two centuries, we are reaching a moment of diminution by dilution. In the nearly thirty years since Watergate and the rise of *60 Minutes*, the proliferation of outlets for news and information has been accompanied by a torrent of investigative reportage. With many local news stations featuring an “I-team” and prime-time newsmagazines offering the promise of

nightly exposés, we have created a permanent infrastructure of news devoted to exposure.

Much of this reportage has the earmarks of watchdog reporting, but there is a difference. Most of these programs do not monitor the powerful elite and guard against the potential for tyrannical abuse. Rather, they tend to concern risks to personal safety or one’s pocketbook.

A study by the Project for Excellence in Journalism in 1998, for instance, dissected a genre of investigative reporting that ignores most of the matters typically associated with the watchdog role. Fewer than one in ten stories on these programs concerned the combined topics of education, economics, foreign affairs, the military, national security, politics, or social welfare — or any of the areas where most public money is spent. More than half the stories, rather, focused on lifestyle, behavior, consumerism, health, or celebrity entertainment.

Safety can often be an important target for watchdog reporting. Yet too much of the new “investigative” reporting is tabloid treatment of everyday circumstances. Consider the Los Angeles TV station, KCBS, that rented a house for two months in 1997 and wired it with a raft of hidden cameras, all to expose the fact that you really can’t get all the carpeting in your house cleaned for \$7.95. When local television news employs its I-teams in such stories as dangerous garage doors or how dirt and bacteria on the clothes consumers put in their washers spread to other clothes, it is worse than a weak story.

First, some of it is what Elizabeth Leamy, an investigative reporter for WTTG-TV in Washington, D.C., calls “just add water” investigative reports,

which appear to be original but are not. These come from consultants who literally offer stations the scripts, the shots, and the experts to interview or the interviews themselves already on tape, and are specifically designed for sweeps periods to generate ratings. TV news producers call such exposés “stunting,” an acknowledgment that they are playing tricks with viewers’ appreciation of investigative work without actually delivering it.

The second problem is that exposing what is readily understood or simply common sense belittles investigative journalism. The press becomes the boy who cried wolf. It squanders its ability to demand the public’s attention because it has done so too many times about trivial matters. It threatens to turn the watchdog’s job into a form of amusement.

The watchdog is unlike any other role. It is similar to other journalism, but requires special skills, a special temperament, a special hunger. It requires a serious commitment of resources and a desire to cover serious concerns. And it requires a press independent of any interest except that of the ultimate consumer of the news. For all the lip service paid to it, the watchdog principle faces more challenge today than ever. ■

Tom Rosenstiel, a former press critic for the Los Angeles Times, is director of the Project for Excellence in Journalism, in Washington, D.C.; Bill Kovach, former curator of the Nieman Foundation at Harvard University, is chairman of the Committee of Concerned Journalists. This is adapted from their book, The Elements of Journalism: What Newspeople Should Know and the Public Should Expect, published in April.



ROLE MODELS LAURA WASHINGTON

“A role model of mine is Pam Zekman, with whom I worked when I was I was at WBBM. At that time in my career, she taught me just about everything I know about investigative reporting. I think she’s the best in the country. She came from print into broadcasting, and has operated fabulously in both arenas. One time, she and a partner posed as husband and wife and opened a bar in downtown Chicago, and then waited for inspectors to come around and put out their hands for money. It was wonderful. They got great stuff.

“Another role model for me was the late Leanita McClain, an African-American editorial board member of the *Chicago Tribune*. She was a superb, spectacular writer, and although she wasn’t specifically an investigative reporter, she became a

role model for me in terms of making your writing sing, and being eloquent and powerful.

“Investigative reporting has interested me because it has impact and gets results. I got into this business because I grew up on the south side of Chicago in a low-income community and saw a lot of injustices being done to African-Americans in particular, and I felt that investigative journalism would be a way to right a lot of those wrongs — to challenge the system, to ask questions. Is the system working for everyone — for people of color and the poor, as well as it is for everyone else? That has been my mission professionally.”

Laura Washington is editor and publisher of The Chicago Reporter.

PRINT

OUT OF THE SPOTLIGHT BUT ON THE MARK

Anybody who thinks investigative reporting is diminishing should visit Investigative Reporters and Editors (IRE), an international organization based at the Missouri School of Journalism in Columbia. Every January, entries for the IRE awards inundate the office. In the print category, they arrive from the expected gigantic news organizations, The Washington Post, The Wall Street Journal, the Chicago Tribune, and so forth. But hundreds of them — including some of the highest quality — come from newspapers barely known outside their home states. Reading these is always educational and usually inspiring.

Much of the time, in newsrooms large and small, the investigative effort is a true collaboration of reporter, ed-



itor, and publisher. Some of the time, however, the reporters must swim upstream, piecing together a project on their own time because newsroom managers are too cheap, too scared, or both to court controversy. For free-lance investigative reporters, time-consuming projects are especially selfless.

The print reporters profiled here are largely unknown outside the craft and in some instances even inside the craft. Dozens more deserve to be so recognized, but for reasons of space are not. Those who are included are meant to represent the best unsung investigative journalists working in print in the United States.

— Tracy Barnett and Steve Weinberg

Elizabeth A. Marchak

'This is the mecca for data, and there are people who are just clueless'

The Plain Dealer (Cleveland) Washington bureau since 1993

BEST-KNOWN INVESTIGATION: ValuJet airlines coverage, 1995-99, that began before the Florida Everglades crash.

FAVORITE INVESTIGATION: "A Deadly Difference: America's Racial Health Divide," revealing a sharp discrepancy in death rates and medical care between blacks and whites, with Dave Davis, March-December 2000.

The afternoon ValuJet lost a DC-9 in the Florida Everglades, Elizabeth Marchak sat down in her basement study and hit the computers. She didn't emerge until 2 A.M. "I just kept thinking of all that humanity," she says. The next morning, the result was a report in the *Plain Dealer* filled with shocking detail. Safety problems had forced the same plane to return to airports seven times in the previous



two years, she reported. The FAA had filed that information but had done little about it. Marchak had begun investigating the airline nearly a year before. Just a month before the crash, she had reported that ValuJet planes had returned to airports for safety reasons at least sixty-eight times in the two-and-a-half years the airline had been in business.

"She clearly spotted something in ValuJet that the rest of the world didn't see until after the crash," says

Matthew L. Wald, transportation safety reporter for *The New York Times*.

Marchak is frequently bothered by an apparent lack of interest in data among many of her Washington-based competitors. "This is the mecca for data, and there are people who are just clueless," she says.

Her flair for the dramatic has helped in her campaign to encourage others to use data, computer technology, and the FOIA to pierce the bureaucratic fog. She's been a regular volunteer trainer for the National Institute for Computer Assisted Reporting (CAR), where she's helped win numerous converts to the cause.

Marchak began her CAR work during a ten-year stint at the *Washington Times*, with a series documenting instances of pedophilia in the Boy Scouts in all fifty states. But the politically conservative *Times* made her life difficult. "That's where I rode out the recession," Marchak says, "in a place where I was always an outsider — because I was a woman, and I was perceived as a liberal. I learned some very valuable lessons as an outsider."

She juggles a packed workday with an equally complicated home life. Her son David, a lively and gifted ten-year-old, struggled for nearly a year with chemotherapy for liver cancer and has difficulty using his hands. Marchak and her husband, W. Stephen Hart, a legislative analyst for the U.S. Forest Service, trade off trips to therapists, teachers, and other specialists. As if that's not enough, Marchak is a big believer in extracurricular projects to relieve the stress. One of her favorites is designing her own clothes. "I don't believe I need to be at the whim of companies that decide this is the year for dusty mauve," she says. Sometimes her side projects tend to take on an investigative edge. One of her latest: an essay for an airline safety manual on the substituting of unsafe parts in airplanes. ■

Duff Wilson

'Generally, I treat people pretty gently, and that's actually helped'

The *Seattle Times* since 1989

BEST-KNOWN INVESTIGATION: "Fear in the Fields" — Exposed the increasingly widespread use of hazardous wastes in fertilizers, 1997. Pulitzer finalist.

FAVORITE INVESTIGATION: Martin Pang Warehouse fire series — he and Eric Nalder tracked down an arsonist and twenty-three errors by the fire department and emergency officials that led to the deaths of four firefighters, 1995.



JIM LOTT/SEATTLE TIMES

Duff Wilson got his first byline at about the age of fourteen. He worked as "slave labor," he jokes, for his parents' small-town *Omak* (Washington) *Chronicle*. A few years later, high school officials reprimanded Wilson for distributing an underground newspaper, and he's been afflicting the comfortable ever since. Wilson's investigations have netted him scores of awards and inspired numerous reforms. He contributed to the demise of U.S. Senator Brock Adams, a Washington Democrat, by breaking the 1992 story about Adams's sexual abuse of a congressional aide. He has also cost the jobs of three corrupt judges, four unlicensed school bus drivers, and three Federal Aviation Administration investigators.

"Duff has a body of work that's extremely impressive, and for much of that career he's worked alongside people who have gotten more recognition and attention than he," says his longtime editor David Boardman. "Duff is quieter, more

reserved; he isn't as well known, but he's done terrific work that has made a difference in the community and in some cases in the nation."

Wilson's most recent investigation was "Uninformed Consent," a five-part series published in March on clinical trials at Seattle's Fred Hutchinson Cancer Research Center. Wilson and his partner, David Heath, reported that cancer patients at the center had died prematurely as a result of the trials, and that neither the patients nor their families had been properly informed of the risks. Additionally, the cancer center and its physicians had a financial interest in the experiments, which they failed to disclose to the patients.

A reserved demeanor and a sympathetic ear have worked to Wilson's advantage. "I can be tough, too," he says, "and I ask direct questions; but generally I treat people pretty gently, and that's actually helped. The press has a bad reputation for shoving microphones in people's faces."

His characteristic equanimity has been ruffled a few times during his twenty-three-year career. The hardest thing he's ever dealt with was the suicide of a judge, who shot himself in the courthouse as Wilson's story exposing him as a pedophile was rolling off the presses. "It was shocking and horrible, but all we could do was go back to work and write the story that he had killed himself," Wilson says. "I felt bad for his friends and family. I'd spent a lot of time with him." The series prompted the state's voters to pass a constitutional amendment that opened the process of disciplining judges.

Wilson's forthcoming HarperCollins book, *Fateful Harvest*, tells the stories of two farmers and a small-town mayor who learned that mining, paper, chemical, and waste companies, among others, were saving money by disposing of toxic wastes on unsuspecting farmers and gardeners. Wilson says the unsafe practice continues.

Among journalists, Wilson, forty-seven, is perhaps best known for "The Reporters' Desktop," hosted by IRE (reporter.org/desktop), a handy online collection of search engines that he assembled to serve as a one-stop resource for investigations. He's a great teacher who works alongside young reporters every day, sharing tips and techniques — and, more importantly, himself. ■

WHAT IS IRE?

It's the premier organization in the world for journalists whose passion is getting to the bottom of things. The 4,500-member, nonprofit Investigative Reporters and Editors (IRE), based at the University of Missouri, is a resource center for print, electronic, and online newspeople who either are expert at conducting investigations or would like to be. It hands out annual awards for the best investigative efforts, and maintains a handy archive — more than 17,000 stories.

At IRE's conferences and annual seminars, thousands of journalists get training in interviewing techniques, following paper trails, probing police abuses, penetrating organized crime, using the Freedom of Information Act, developing a beat, exposing discrimination, and whatever else an investigator needs to know.

Twenty-six years ago, when IRE was founded by a handful of muckrakers, teachers, and publishers, reporters were still hammering away on manual typewriters. But by 1994, IRE and the university helped spark the industry's digital revolution by starting the National Institute for Computer-Assisted Reporting (NICAR). NICAR spurred the growth of IRE, particularly in revenues, as newsrooms across the nation opened their doors to NICAR training sessions.

— Matthew Fogel

Karen Dillon

'Coming to journalism late in life, after you've worked on an assembly line and had a kid, you have a different perspective.'

The Kansas City Star since 1991

BEST-KNOWN INVESTIGATION: PeeWee Herman exposure arrest, *Sarasota Herald-Tribune*, 1991.

FAVORITE INVESTIGATION: "To Protect and Collect," 1999 and continuing — Missouri police bypassed state laws to divert drug forfeiture money from schools to their own departments; 2000 series found the same across the nation.



WENDY WANG/THE KANSAS CITY STAR

She's the classic Horatio Alger story of the newspaper world. Karen Dillon literally started on the ground floor, leaving her factory job as a typesetter at a tiny daily in Boone, Iowa, and working her way up through composing. Two decades, a pile of awards, and scores of wary cops later, she's emerging as the nation's leading reporter on laws regulating police seizure of money and assets from suspected drug dealers. Her reporting is

shifting the course of the war on drugs.

"She's turned a battleship around on a dime, just through the sheer force of her will," says Mike McGraw, who has served as Dillon's partner in outrage. "She reminds me of a terrier on steroids," he jokes. "She's unbending, relentless — she just doesn't give up."

Dillon has been trailing public officials since her days at the University of Missouri, where as a student reporter she caught the city parks director fabricating data to justify closing a city pool in a largely black district. Her research showed that attendance at the pool was roughly double what the parks director had reported, and the cost was half.

Her stint in Sarasota taught the police it was better to give her a straight answer than to dodge her. She reported that deputies were getting naked with prostitutes and then arresting them for prostitution. That was years before she caught the Kansas City police with a multimillion-dollar slush fund being used for everything from extravagant travel to secret settlements for unlawful police conduct.

Part of Dillon's success comes from learning the law — sometimes better than those whose job it is to enforce it. In the forfeiture case, she used the Internet to access the forfeiture laws of all 50 states, building a database to compare them. She found that thirty-five states have a law that prohibits local police from the common practice of handing over cash seized in drug busts to the Drug Enforcement Administration. Typically, the DEA returns most of the money to the police department for its general fund. The system gives police a strong incentive to focus a disproportionate effort on drug enforcement, Dillon discovered.

In the five police agencies she examined, 95 percent of all search warrants were for drug cases — "not for burglary, not for assaults, but for drug cases. Suddenly you realize that this is all the police are doing — fighting the drug war."

Dillon, forty-nine, has her soft side, too, which emerges when she talks about Jennifer, the daughter she nursed through severe health problems while working her way through school and juggling her hectic career. The trials of her life outside journalism, McGraw believes, have only strengthened her resolve as an investigative reporter.

"Coming to journalism late in life, after you've already worked on an assembly line and had a kid, gives you a different perspective on being a journalist," McGraw says. "You're more tenacious; you don't want to just move on to the next thing." ■

Barry Yeoman

'I wasn't coming in like just another white male, but rather someone who at least had a taste of what it was to be an outsider.'

Free-lance; previously with the *Independent Weekly*, Durham, North Carolina

BEST-KNOWN INVESTIGATION: "Highway Robbery"; the *Independent Weekly*, Durham, North Carolina, 1992 — Revealed widespread corruption, environmental destruction, and needless dislocation in the state's highway-building practices.

FAVORITE INVESTIGATION: "Silence in the Fields"; *Mother Jones*, January/February 2001 — Documented a federal program that imports temporary foreign guest workers but forces them to keep silent about abusive working conditions.



His soft-spoken investigator may go up against some of the biggest institutional villains in the country, but the heart of his work lies in the years he's spent breaking bread with Hispanic farmworkers and poultry workers, prison inmates and slum dwellers. Yeoman specializes in becoming a part of his subjects' lives; he works hard to dispel the image of the parachute journalist who drops in, grabs the story, and runs. For a series on the immigrant community of central North

Carolina, he spent six months attending church services, baptisms, and dinners with the Loves Creek Hispanic Baptist ministry before conducting a single interview.

Yeoman has struggled from childhood with a burden he's turned into a blessing: a stutter that prompted his favorite journalism professor to discourage him from the field. Yeoman persevered, and he's found that the stutter has opened more doors than it closed.

"I wasn't coming in like just another white male, but

rather someone who had at least had a taste of what it was to be an outsider," he says. At age forty, he has been an outsider in more ways than one; his sexual orientation is not something he makes a big issue of, but he doesn't hide it, either. As a founding member and newsletter editor of *Passing Twice*, an international organization of gays and lesbians who stutter, he has served as a mentor for a minority group that has never entered the consciousness of most Americans.

Yeoman's investigative work has won notice far beyond the small to mid-sized alternative markets he writes for. For example, a 1989 investigation of the poultry industry for tiny *Southern Exposure* magazine gained national attention when it won the National Magazine Award. Soon thereafter, the *Atlanta Journal-Constitution*, *The Wall Street Journal*, and National Public Radio picked up the story.

His first investigative project out of college was for *The Times of Acadiana*, an alternative paper in Lafayette, Louisiana. He reported that a local ambulance company was persuading residents to buy unnecessary "subscriptions" for better service, even though the company was required to serve the entire city for a standard price. "It was a real quick introduction in how to make enemies quick, and I loved it," Yeoman says. "These guys in business suits would walk down the street and point at me, and it was quite a head rush for a little New York Jew on the bayou."

From 1986 to 1999, Yeoman was one of those who inspired CJR to credit the award-winning weekly the *Independent* with "a spine of steel." But on New Year's Day, 2000, he celebrated the millennium by going free-lance full-time. His longtime editor and friend Eric Bates, who has known him since their early days at *Southern Exposure*, rattles off a list of Yeoman's prizes: National Magazine Award, Batten Medal, Green Eyeshade — "almost everything there is to win short of the Pulitzer." Bates, now an editor at *Mother Jones*, where Yeoman frequently contributes, calls Yeoman "one of the leading investigative reporters today, and hardly anyone knows his name." ■

Melvin Claxton

'I'm not governed by, "Here's how we've always done it." Because I've seen it done other ways.'

The Detroit News since 1998

BEST-KNOWN INVESTIGATION: "Virgin Islands Crime Series" — Documented connections between the islands' rampant crime and corruption in the criminal justice system, 1994. Pulitzer winner.

FAVORITE INVESTIGATION: "Antigua, Corruption Inc." — Explored the connections between political corruption and drug smuggling from the Caribbean island, March 1994.

Melvin Claxton, forty-three, is hardly a regular in the newsroom of *The Detroit News*. He's more likely to be found in some obscure government office, reading through dusty

boxes of documents, or out pounding the streets of the city, tracking down sources. Or he might be sitting in his home office, dreaming up his next project. After ten years, on and off, as a reporter on the tiny staff of *The Virgin Islands Daily News*, Claxton has taken his Pulitzer to a place where he calls his own shots. Living isn't as easy in Detroit as in St. Croix or his native Antigua, but it's a good news town.

After his fifty-story megaproject on crime in the Virgin Islands won the Pulitzer in 1995, Claxton fielded lots of offers from the mainland, but resisted them until the *Chicago Tribune* lured him away in 1997. When *The Detroit News* offered him more autonomy, he moved again. He had worked for four years as a government statistician in Antigua before becoming a reporter. His background shows clearly in his work, says Penny Feuerzeig, former executive editor at the *Daily News*.

"He doesn't get bamboozled easily," she says. "Most of us are so word-oriented and so math illiterate that we can get spun easily when it comes to numbers. The fact that Melvin has such a solid base in that area puts him on the side of those who are doing the spinning."

Like many investigative reporters, Claxton doesn't aspire to any particular thematic specialty; he likes to cover fresh ground with each project, so he's as likely to delve into a corrupt housing project or a school system as he is to examine crime or police. "I make an effort not to repeat myself," he says.

The youngest of thirteen children, Claxton had to learn early that he needed to work harder to distinguish himself from the crowd. His father, a party activist in the Progressive Labor Movement in Antigua, instilled an early interest in the political system, and his education at a British-style school on the island inspired his love of the language. Being from outside the mainland, too, has given him a broader perspective than reporters who spend their whole careers in the States. "I don't think I carry the same baggage as people who grew up in this country," he says. "I'm not governed by 'Here's how we've always done it,' because I've seen it done other ways."



He has taken the opportunity to explore another career outside journalism; in 1988, he left reporting to help his brothers run a real estate business. Soon afterward, Hurricane Hugo struck the island and put him out of a job. He returned to writing, but in a different mode; he moved back to Antigua to write the great Caribbean novel, and during his research, was astonished at the corruption he saw all around him. Claxton pitched a project to his former editors

at the *Daily News* and he was soon back at work as an investigative reporter. The result: his award-winning series, "Antigua, Corruption Inc."

Recent projects have included an exposé of the gun industry, an analysis of a wasted \$1.3 billion bond issue, and an investigation into terrible management at the Detroit Fire Department that led to numerous citizen deaths.

"Melvin is a world-class reporter and writer, and that's an incredible combination," Feuerzeig says. "He has a great ability to unearth information, and in persuading people to open up and talk to him." ■

Robert Dreyfuss

'I have no patience or interest in gossip insider Washington culture.'

Free-lance since 1992; formerly *Public Citizen*.

BEST-KNOWN INVESTIGATION: National Rifle Association series — Four articles in *Mother Jones*, *American Prospect*, *The Nation*, and *Rolling Stone* that contributed to the downfall of NRA director Neal Knox, 1995-1996.

FAVORITE INVESTIGATION: "Left Out in the Cold," *Mother Jones* magazine — Probed the mysterious death of ex-CIA agent Monte Overacre, January/February 1998.



Corporate abuse isn't a beat many people gladly take on; it's a secretive world, troublesome, time-consuming, and hard to sell to editors. Robert Dreyfuss relishes the challenge. He developed an antiestablishment edge early, during his involvement in the antiwar movement at Columbia University. Unlike many whose idealism waned over the years, Dreyfuss seems more committed than ever.

The Washington, D.C.-based free-lancer has been an outsider from the beginning. "I have no patience or interest in gossip insider Washington culture — the journalism cliques, the correspondents' dinners, the National Press Foundation, the people who wear tuxedos. They're not even reporters, they're people to be investigated."

Dreyfuss got his start with Ralph Nader's *Public Citizen*, making the break to become a free-lancer in 1992. Now that he's on the mastheads of *Mother Jones*, *The Nation*, and *American Prospect*, and a regular contributor to half-a-dozen magazines, he has more work than he can easily handle.

"He's a virtuoso," says co-editor Robert Kuttner of *American Prospect*. "He's got the classic great reporter's ability to persuade sources to confide in him, and he's got the gift of a great storyteller."

Dreyfuss's reporting takes him through the halls of Congress and the Beltway bureaucracies, studying the influence of Big Tobacco, the insurance industry, and the National Rifle Association, to name a few. It's taken him to Vietnam and to the shadowy world of the CIA, interviewing spies and "slam-bam communist fighters."

Dreyfuss backgrounded himself on the CIA by attending meetings and conferences for intelligence types, and by hanging out online at a CompuServe forum dedicated to intelligence issues. One day, a man posted a message saying he'd just resigned from the CIA. He was angry, he said, and he'd like to tell his story to a journalist. It took several weeks for Dreyfuss to gain his trust, but eventually Monte Overacre, who had been recruiting for the CIA's economic espionage program, began to send Dreyfuss detailed memos on the program. Just before the two were scheduled to meet, Overacre was killed in a plane crash in Guatemala. Dreyfuss contacted Overacre's

family in Idaho, who gave him permission to examine detailed files the agent had left behind. Dreyfuss's story for *Mother Jones* made a strong case that Overacre had secretly returned to spy work and was once again on CIA business when he died.

Dreyfuss and his wife adopted a Vietnamese child in 1996, and spent a few weeks in Vietnam while awaiting the final papers. He developed a strong affinity for the country and promised he'd return. He did, writing about the continuing legacy of Agent Orange, and about aggressive marketing by cigarette manufacturers. ■

Mary Hargrove

'I keep telling people there is an angel that sits with me.'

Arkansas Democrat-Gazette since 1994

BEST-KNOWN INVESTIGATION: "Juvenile Justice: The War Within," *Arkansas Democrat-Gazette*, 1998

FAVORITE INVESTIGATION: A series on the Penn Square Bank in Oklahoma City, *The Tulsa Tribune*, 1982



Mary Hargrove's career has been as colorful as the many-hued file folders she uses to organize her cases: "Jim Guy Tucker's orange, James McDougal's green . . ." Tucker's political career is just one of the casualties left in the crusading reporter's wake. Hargrove and her fellow reporters, Michael Whiteley and Don Johnson, felt gratified when the independent counsel Kenneth Starr said he'd read their work and assigned it to his staff.

The former Arkansas governor was indicted in connection with the Whitewater case, and later convicted of conspiracy and mail fraud.

Last year Hargrove marked her fiftieth birthday by producing her fiftieth investigative series. As she summarizes her methodology, she laughs. "I keep telling people there's an angel that sits with me."

Her angel takes on some pretty macabre subjects. Hargrove's pieces on pedophilia, child pornography, and child abuse are not meant for breakfast-table consumption. Her 1998 series on juvenile justice won the Robert F. Kennedy Grand Prize and the Casey Medal; those are the two she's proudest of. The rest are on the floor behind her desk.

Hargrove feels she's living on borrowed time; she loves to tell about the five times she has "dropped dead" because of a disorder she describes as an "electrical shortage in my brain." Her brushes with death assure that she no longer takes a single day for granted. Her sense of humor often borders on the outrageous, and her colleagues respond in kind. For her birthday last year, for example, *Democrat-Gazette* staffers presented her with a mock defibrillator.

Hargrove attributes some of her tough edges to her childhood. She was close to her father, but faced emotional and sometimes physical abuse from her mother, who struggled with mental illness. It was the family secret. The experience

helped her to identify deeply with many of her subjects. The child-abuse cases hit so close to home that Hargrove has developed coping mechanisms to keep from internalizing her subjects' pain. Sometimes she comes home and works in the garden; sometimes she has a massage. One thing she's learned not to do is talk about her work with her friends.

"I used to think it was good to tell people, just to get it out; but they'd get horrified, and then I'd get horrified with them," she says. "The talking about it makes it come alive again. It doesn't help me or them."

Griffin Smith, executive editor at the *Democrat-Gazette*, flew down to *The Miami Herald* in 1994 to hire her away. He's glad he did.

"We wanted an absolutely top-flight investigative reporter, which was what we got," Smith says. "Mary shines light into dark corners. There are others who do it, but she's the most experienced; I have to say she's at the top." ■

Fred Schulte & Jenni Bergal

'We both have a sense of outrage when the system isn't working. All of our work reflects that.'

South Florida Sun-Sentinel (Ft. Lauderdale)
Schulte since 1978, Bergal since 1981

BEST-KNOWN INVESTIGATION (SCHULTE): VA Hospital series, 1984 and '86 — Uncovered sloppy medical practices leading to the needless suffering and deaths of scores of veterans. Pulitzer finalist.

BEST-KNOWN INVESTIGATION (BERGAL): "Cosmetic Surgery — The Hidden Dangers," with Schulte, 1998: Exposed a lack of regulation in the field that has led to disfigurement and death for many across Florida. Pulitzer finalist.

FAVORITE INVESTIGATION (SCHULTE): "Destination in Doubt," 1992 — An exposé of boiler-room telemarketing operations that sold fraudulent vacation packages.

FAVORITE INVESTIGATION (BERGAL): Coverage of Maria DeSillers, a flamboyant Florida resident who raised nearly three-quarters of a million dollars for her son's liver transplants, kept a chunk of it for herself — and then stiffed the hospital for part of the bill, 1987-88.

This husband-and-wife team is among the longest-running investigative duos in the business. Their subject matter is varied, but often returns to the theme of health care. Schulte, forty-eight, got his start as a reporter for a medical trade publication in Rockville, Maryland. When he moved to the *Sun-Sentinel* in 1978, he quickly began seeing that the health-care system wasn't working the way it had been presented inside the Beltway. He was among the first to expose the billion-dollar HMO industry, finding fraudulent signups and fictitious patients on a massive scale. He's been a finalist for a Pulitzer three times — most recently on the cosmetic surgery story with Bergal, forty-three, who first teamed up with

Schulte on an investigation of child deaths in 1986. Together, the two have won more than 100 awards.

While much of their reporting has been solo or with other reporters, they have found a happy partnership in their work together. "Fred's the idea man," Bergal says, and while Schulte is also heavily involved in the legwork, he is grateful for her attention to detail and her ability to ferret out the facts.

"She brings home the bacon," he says. "We both have a sense of outrage when the system isn't working. All of our work reflects that. We try to present the view from the little guy."

The classic Bergal-Schulte investigation involves combing through the archives of state and local agencies, looking for inconsistencies and oversights. "A lot of the time, there are six or seven agencies that deal with a case but they never talk to each other," Schulte says. "We go around and try to sweep up every bit of data. Pretty soon you can dig out things that people who are running the system don't know."

Their methodology hasn't endeared them to the bureaucrats they cover; Veterans Administration officials refused to speak with Schulte, and would only answer questions submitted in writing. The head of the Florida Department of Health and Rehabilitation Services complained to Bergal's top editor about her critical coverage. Their searches take them into the most obscure — and sometimes uncomfortable — repositories of information. For the cosmetic surgery story, for example, Bergal spent weeks poring over documents in five county morgues. That series, and one that followed on the vanity medicine business, led to a moratorium on office surgeries and later a mandatory prison sentence for those who practiced without a license.

Most recently, their series "Crashing for Cash" revealed a network of swindlers throughout the state that stages phony crashes and works with corrupt chiropractors and lawyers to bilk the insurance industry of millions.

Schulte takes the lead in the computer-assisted aspect of their work. Before computer-assisted reporting became an industry standard, he was working with the computer gurus in state bureaucracies to build databases and to document trends in public health and the health-care industry.

"They're terrific reporters — fact-heavy, shoe-leather reporters who are absolutely rigorous," says longtime fan Peggy Engel, director of the Alicia Patterson Foundation. "They have a great sense of humor about dealing with roadblocks; they're constantly being stonewalled, yet they manage to get the goods every time."

One thing that characterizes their work is an emphasis on solutions; a part of each series suggests how the system might be changed. "We try to provide a road map for reform," Bergal says. ■



Steve Weinberg is a contributing editor to CJR, and one of the founders of IRE. Tracy Barnett is a free-lance writer and editor.



Who Owns This Photograph?

A free-lance photographer vs. *The New York Times*

Many media companies are at odds with free-lance writers and photographers over who owns the words and images once they have appeared in print. The fight is being waged not only in public (see page 13), but also in private. What follows is a record of one such tug of war, an exchange of letters about a single picture.

The exchange was triggered by an e-mail from the photographer, George S. Zimbel, of Montreal, to Barbara Cox of Photokunst, a consulting firm for both individual photographers and archives, including the Times archives.

In a message to Barbara Cox of Photokunst dated

NOVEMBER 21, 2000

Dear Barbara:

I currently have a retrospective at Sala Millares in Madrid and on the swing back, stopped at Paris Photo where several of my dealers had booths. My wife saw your booth and suggested that I might have some prints in that collection. Although I have free-lanced for the [New York] Times for over forty years, I said "no" because I always sell "One Time Rights" and the Times does not own any of my work. Surprise!! #122, George S. Zimbel: Jacqueline & John Kennedy, NYC 1960 8/10 print described as "vintage." Price \$4,000.

I have not authorized the sale of any of my work through *The New York Times* and would like that print and any others that you may have of mine returned safely to me at the address below.

Thanks for your attention in this matter.

Yours truly,
George S. Zimbel

NOVEMBER 28, 2000

Dear Mr. Zimbel:

I am counsel for The New York Times Company. Your November 21, 2000 e-mail to Barbara Cox has been referred to me for a response.

You assert in your letter that all physical photographs taken by you and submitted to the *Times* for one-time reproduction are not owned by the *Times*. We disagree.

Our understanding has always been that title to the physical prints passed to us upon payment to you for the right to reproduce the photo. This understanding is reflected both in our practice of retaining or disposing of prints without the involvement of the photographers, and in the fact that, in the many years since we first acquired the photographs, you have

never before seen fit to request their return or otherwise challenge our ownership. Indeed, to accept your position one must believe that for all these years, the *Times* has been providing free storage for your property.

In sum, it is our position that we own the prints you refer to in your letter. Therefore, we decline to comply with your request that we first comb our extensive archives for photographs from you and then return them.

Please feel free to contact me in the event you have further questions.

Very truly yours,
Maggie R. Drucker

NOVEMBER 29, 2000

Dear Maggie:

You get paid when you write letters and I don't, but sometimes I have to come out of the darkroom and tend to business and ethical issues.

First I will deal with the philosophical aspects of this situation. You always had a wonderful photography staff . . . Bill Eckenberg was a friend when I was still at Columbia; Pat Burns and I used to trip over each other on the political beat, etc., etc., so your true *New York Times* archive is rich in content and available for whatever commercial exploitation the *Times* feels is profitable. You have paid these people a salary. Their negatives are undoubtedly in a file somewhere at the *Times*.

The free-lance people traditionally have worked for the *Times* on a one-time reproduction rights basis with the modest remuneration based on that fact . . . I don't know how many free-lance photographers or the estates of deceased photographers have contacted you, but if the letter I received is the response they get I am very sad that you have seen fit to treat us in this manner. To quote a letter which Arthur [Ochs Sulzberger] Jr. wrote to me last year: "times have changed," but they have not changed so much that you can take my property to sell for your profit. If I rent a car from you, I am just renting a car. It doesn't give me the right to sell the car once I am finished with the rental.

I would suggest the following process to deal with this situation. First, talk to your photo editors to better understand the procedures which have been followed by the *Times* in dealing with free-lance photographers. Then, for those photographers who are lucky enough to still be alive, offer to return their material, or if they wish to participate in this process pay them a 50 percent commission on any sales which the *Times* may make. My personal wish is to get my material back, but others may opt to sell through the *Times*.

I hope you give this serious attention because it is a serious matter.

Yours truly,
George S. Zimbel

DECEMBER 6, 2001

Dear Mr. Zimbel:

I am in receipt of your November 29 letter.

I have conferred with my clients and have determined that there are no plans to sell any photographs taken by you and printed in *The New York Times*.

I am hopeful that the foregoing will satisfy your concerns. Please feel free to contact me if you have any questions.

Very truly yours,
Maggie R. Drucker

DECEMBER 11, 2000

Dear Maggie Drucker,

Thank you for your letter of December 6 in which you say "there are no plans to sell any photographs taken by you and printed in *The New York Times*." When I first read your letter I had a feeling that it didn't say anything that would address the issues I raised with you. Then I thought, "you are being too suspicious" and I brought it home for my wife to read. She said "It doesn't address any of the issues you raised." So here I am again when I should be in the darkroom.

First is the question of the "Jacqueline & John Kennedy, N.Y.C. 1960" print . . . It is my property and I would like to have it safely returned. I assume that it is the only print of my work that Photokunst/*The New York Times* is offering for sale. If there are others let me know. In regard to whatever prints of mine may be in your archives I would like them returned to me and, in any event, I do not give permission for them to be sold. Thanks for your attention to this matter.

My best regards,
George Zimbel

P.S. I have only one addiction in my life, and that is reading *The New York Times*. I have read it since I was a teenager in 1943, and have worked for it since the early 1950s, so my position is not antagonistic. I just want this settled.

DECEMBER 20, 2000

Dear Mr. Zimbel:

. . . In your recent letter, you requested the return of your photographs, including this one. Let me explain why (in addition to the fact that there is no legal basis for returning photos, which we have discussed) we can't comply. That photo, through the years, has become a historical document by virtue of the *Times*'s possession of it. The back of it has become as important as the front because it is a passport to its life at our newspaper, showing captions and date stamps. In fact, it is this very documentation that gives value to the scuffed print. I'm sure you know that, in Paris, we framed the pictures to expose the backs, and we were not surprised when visitors were as interested in that part of the picture's history as they were in the image itself.

As a photographer who has shot extensively throughout his life, I know you understand the worth that the *Times* brings to history, and now your photograph has become part of ours.

I hope you can understand our position and that we have satisfied your concerns.

Very truly yours,
Maggie R. Drucker

JANUARY 3, 2001

Dear Maggie:

What an eloquent letter.

Please fax or e-mail me the front and back of my Kennedy picture which was offered for sale in Paris. I know it was not made for *The New York Times* and I want to know its provenance. After I receive it, I will respond to your letter, specifically in regard to that print.

My best regards,
George S. Zimbel

JANUARY 12, 2001

Dear Mr. Zimbel:

Pursuant to your January 3, 2001 request, I have enclosed a copy of the front and back of the Kennedy photograph.

Please feel free to contact me with any further questions or concerns.

Very truly yours,
Maggie R. Drucker

JANUARY 16, 2001

Dear Maggie:

I have now received the photocopy front and back of my photograph "John & Jacqueline Kennedy 1960, NYC" that you offered for sale through Photokunst in Paris. The provenance has now become clear.

The print was requested by your photo editor . . . At that time I lived in Dobbs Ferry, New York, as indicated from the stamp on the back. It evidently was used by your women's page and was not returned to me after use as is the normal procedure but instead was put in your morgue. It was not shot for *The New York Times*. (See *American Politicians*, MoMA, 1994 — page 34). It was done for an ongoing personal documentary project on American politics.

Now I am going to reply to your letter of 20 December 2000. I do not agree that you own the print, despite your citing a "legal basis" for your claim. You get paid to cite legal bases which then have to be challenged in court in order to be resolved.

That is not my path. I am a documentary photographer who is trying to do my work. I could walk away from this, but I don't choose to do so, despite the urging of my doctor/art consultant.

You mention that my photo has become a historical document by virtue of the *Times*'s "possession" of it. My photograph is a historical document because of its content. The fact that the *Times* stamped dates on the back and used red grease crayon on the surface "gives value to this scuffed print" and so, in the new world of commercial exploitation, the *Times* offered my photograph for sale in Paris for \$4,000 through Photokunst.

I am getting very upset as I write this, but I will continue and quote your last paragraph and respond. You wrote: ". . . I know you understand the worth the *Times* brings to history, and now your photograph has become part of ours." That is very eloquent but the reality is that the reproduction of my photograph has become a part of the *Times*'s history. My Kennedy photographs are in the collections of MoMA, ICP, Museum of Fine Arts Houston, Musée du Québec, Musée d'art Contemporain de Montréal, Institut Valencia d'Art Modern, and other collections. That is a historical context.

You have my permission to scan that print, front and back for your archive, with any future sales from that scan paid for in the normal manner which has been our way of working together for nearly fifty years.

I value the *Times* more than you will ever know. My con-

cerns will be satisfied when I receive my print properly packed here at my studio. That is a *Times* tradition.

Best regards,
George S. Zimbel

JANUARY 17, 2001

Dear Mr. Zimbel:

I was pleased to hear that the issue of your Kennedy photograph has been resolved and that the print is being returned to you. As I think Jim Mones [director of *The New York Times* Photo Archive] made clear to you, our return of the photograph does not suggest that we do not stand by our legal position. We continue to believe in our ownership of the print, but, in the spirit of compromise, we have agreed to make an exception in this case.

Sincerely,
Maggie R. Drucker

FEBRUARY 12, 2001

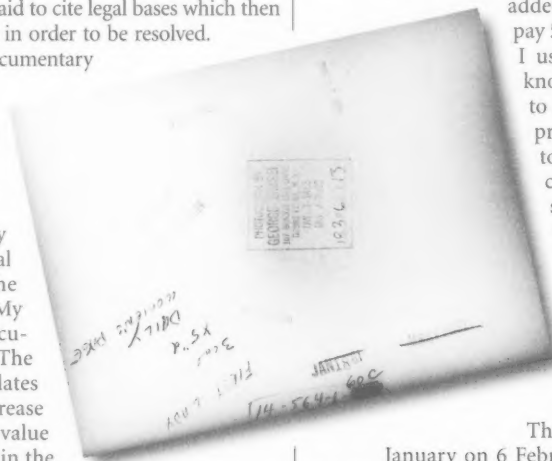
Dear Maggie Drucker:

Jim Mones used terms such as "valued contributor" and "longtime relationship" in our final conversation before he returned my photograph of "Jacqueline & John Kennedy, 1960." In the conversation prior to that he said that the archive was returning my print, and then added the proviso that I would have to pay 50 percent to the *Times* if I sold it! I used several expletives to let him know that the photograph belonged to me and I expected it returned properly packed. He urged me "not to get excited" and said he would call me the following day. He did, stating that the photograph would be returned with no provisos. It was and he kept his word. So, after thirty-nine years the print was where it was supposed to be — in my possession, in my archive with the original negative. It is and always has been my property.

Then I received your letter dated 17 January on 6 February . . . I will begin by saying that I consider that letter as insulting as the first one you wrote. I am not an exception, I am one of those free-lance people who you seem intent on denigrating in the name of increased profits for The New York Times Company. Now I know what Arthur Jr. meant when he wrote me "times have changed." So, that is clear.

I am ashamed of you and your management colleagues. I still have the highest regard for your editors, writers, and photographers. Your statements have the feel of events in Florida during the last election with lawyers and persons of authority depriving people of what was theirs. You are expending huge amounts of highly paid time to deprive free-lance photographers of their property and consequently of income for the minimal amount of profit that will be generated by this mean-spirited policy. It is not acceptable. You use your muscle in words in a court of law because you are lawyers. I will use my muscle in words in the court of public opinion because I am a communicator.

George S. Zimbel



And for 2001, Pulitzer Prizes go to...



The editorial staff of the Chicago Tribune
in the category of explanatory reporting for its
"Gateway to Gridlock" series about air travel in America.



Paul Salopek of the Chicago Tribune
in the category of international reporting for his
stories on political strife and disease in Africa.

We believe our journalists are the best in the business and
we are proud of the work that earned them journalism's highest honor.

Chicago Tribune

beyond words



A Moment in Time.

Congratulations to Alan Diaz
for winning the 2001 Pulitzer Prize
for Breaking News Photography

AP, the world's premier news, photo, audio and video service.
It's easy to see why.

AP Associated Press
www.ap.org

The Travel Section

Roads Not Taken

BY THOMAS SWICK

Why is so much travel writing so boring? Why on Monday morning do people talk about an op-ed piece they read in the Sunday paper, or a sports column, or a magazine essay, or a feature profile, but rarely a travel story? Why do the travel magazines, lavish with tips and sumptuous photographs, leave us feeling so empty? (Journalism's tiramisu.) Why has the travel book become a rich literary domain while the travel story has not?

One simple answer is that Travel is not a high priority at any newspaper. Like Food, Fashion, Home & Garden, it is far removed from the main business of reporting the news. Yet the Travel section has enormous potential precisely because of its life of low expectations. It need not adhere to the strictures of journalism that govern the rest of the newspaper — brevity, clarity, distance; instead it can accommodate leisurely, nuanced, occasionally passionate writing. Because it is not the most important section of the paper — quite the contrary — it can experiment, take risks, have fun. It should — by virtue of its generous space, deadlines, and subject matter — feature the best writing in the newspaper.

But it's had its handicaps. In the old days Travel sections brimmed with florid passages of trumped-up delights, usually written by a recent guest of the hotel or island or tour being extolled. Then in the late 1980s a debate on ethics was launched, and many papers cut their ties with writers who took subsidized trips. This should have improved the sections, since many of the people cast out — so called "professional travel writers" — were free-loaders who had simply found a cheap way to travel.

But the trend had already shifted to-



CONTACT: A Geisha chats on a cell phone before a parade in Kyoto

ward more service-oriented articles, telling readers where to stay and what to see and how to do it. Of course, Travel sections have to publish helpful information; it would be churlish of them not to. People come to them looking not only for ideas, but for ways and means. But a concentration on the practical to the exclusion of the evocative and ruminative discriminates against the large number of people who — for various reasons — don't travel. It ignores the fact that, in this day of disappearing foreign bureaus, the Travel section is many papers' only in-house window on the world at large. And it does a disservice to people who *do* travel by suggesting that this patently transportive act is nothing more than a series of negotiable transactions. (Not to mention the fact that the

job of merely stockpiling information is now being done much better — with greater timeliness and infinitely wider scope — on the Internet.)

To serve their purposes, without appearing too utilitarian, newspapers have created a standard type of travel story that is generally about a person who goes to a place — as opposed to being about a place — often with a spouse or companion. In this genre, a variation on the phrase "my husband, Ken, and I," is pretty much *de rigueur* by at least the third paragraph. These two prim sojourners invariably stay in good hotels ("elegant" if in a city, "rustic" in the country), and eat in fine restaurants, savoring the "succulent regional cuisine." They visit the museums and other sights, which allows for the inclusion of pertinent historical facts,

THOMAS SWICK/SOUTH FLORIDA SUN-SENTINEL



GROUND LEVEL: "Mud men" at a carnival in Trinidad

as well as helpful touristic information. "The following two days were packed with visits to Neapolis, the Greek theater, and the Latomia del Paradiso (an ancient quarry, now overgrown), never leaving us time to use the hotel's inviting private beach" (from a *New York Times* story by Ken's wife, last September). The author may express to his or her companion admiration for ancient skills or practices, which, it is sometimes added, are sadly lacking today. They stroll cobblestone streets, palm-fringed beaches, hedgerowed lanes, patchwork fields (pick your picturesqueness); they drift blissfully through a "land of contrasts." Though sometimes baffled by strange money or foreign telephones, they are never in any danger. They leave enchanted and refreshed — though rarely moved or permanently altered — frequently vowing to return some day. It is the travel story's equivalent of living happily ever after, and it leaves a reader with the sense that something is missing in this fairy tale.

For starters, there's almost nothing negative. This is partly a vestige of the old days of free trips, when it was bad form to speak unfavorably of a place that had treated you lavishly. A tone of uncritical approval crept into travel journalism that has yet to be eradicated. Paul Theroux's famously sniping journeys are an obvious reaction against this rosininess, though his style, despite the enormous popularity of his books, has failed to make a dent in travel journalism.

The irony is that in their mission to "inform" their readers, Travel sections misinform them through their unrelenting good cheer. A few years ago I received

a call from a woman who wished to express her despair at the large number of stray dogs she'd seen on a trip to Puerto Rico. Her complaint was against the island, but implicit in it was an indictment of travel journalism, for nothing she had read about Puerto Rico had prepared her for abandoned animals.

Joining the "negative" in the travel story's closet of unmentionables is a sense of the present. It is not that the stories are timeless, but rather that their preferred frame of reference is the past.

The narrators of conventional travel stories tend to be interested only in history; if the present intrudes in their stories at all it does so in the ephemeral and nugatory realm of the trendy: the latest restaurants, the hottest clubs. But during the day, their work hours, they dutifully visit the museums, the landmarks, the churches, the battlefields; they ignore the everyday life of the streets. Which is why when you read about Puerto Rico you hear all about the colonial architecture of old San Juan and nothing about the population of stray dogs.

A knowledge of the past is, of course, essential to an understanding of the present. And the past is easy: it is housed, displayed, labeled (often in English), accessible. The present is fluid, inchoate, and often unintelligible. It is an unknown quantity. History books, guidebooks, travel stories have all told us the lessons of yesteryear; the challenge and thrill of travel is discovering those of today. And we find them in the streets and the parks, in cafes and stadiums, in offices and homes. Some of these places

are difficult to gain access to, but that is precisely the point: anyone can see a painting; it is a rare and invaluable privilege to get invited in for a meal. It is this distinction — how you travel, not where — that defines a traveler as opposed to a tourist. And it is the job of travel writers to have experiences that are beyond the realm of the average tourist, to go beneath the surface, and then to write interestingly of what they find.

One way to accomplish the latter is to employ the third element missing from the conventional travel story: imagination. Most travel journalists are under the impression that since they are writing nonfiction — and travel nonfiction at that — they need only record what is there (and, as we have seen, not all of that). Yet all writing is enhanced by a creative imagination. To illustrate, I present the lead from a *New York Times* travel story, dated September 3, 2000. (Though not the one by Ken's wife.)

"Just my luck," I muttered, gazing at the unattended welcome sign to Lassen Volcanic National Park in Northern California. "STOP. Pay \$10 here," it said. All I had was a \$20 bill.

Compare that with this lead, from a story by Peter Ackroyd, which appears in *Views from Abroad*, a collection of travel writing from the *London Spectator*:

Each Nordic country is cold in its own way; in Oslo, it is a rural cold, the cold of surrounding landscape. An urban cold rises from Stockholm, from the streets and public buildings. In Helsinki it is an elemental cold, a cold which invades the body and leaves it stunned. At midday you gaze at the sun without blinking; all things turn to ice. It is like the coldness of God. To travel here from Sweden is to move from light sleep to a harsh and sudden consciousness.

Ackroyd's imaginative sense — aside from keeping us spellbound — leads to insight, which is the fourth element missing from the conventional travel story. Good travel writers understand that times have changed, and in an age when everybody has been everywhere (and when there is a Travel Channel for those who haven't), it is not enough simply to describe a landscape, you must now interpret it. Jonathan Raban, writing about the Mississippi River floods in *Granta* a few years back, opened with this show-stopping sentence: "Flying to Minneapolis from the West, you see it as a theological problem." He went on to describe "this right-angled, right-thinking Lutheran

country" and the "deviously winding" Mississippi River, which "looks as if it had been put here to teach the God-fearing Midwest a lesson about stubborn and unregenerate nature." Just as travel sections have become more practical, travel books have become more analytical.

Read enough stories with sentences beginning "Just my luck" and "My husband, Ken, and I" and you soon discover the fifth element that is too often absent from the conventional travel story: humor. Occasionally, you will find pieces by writers with a light, amusing style, but the humor is almost always directed at themselves — the innocent fumbblings of the fish out of water. Its sole purpose is to get a laugh, not to reveal interesting truths about national character.

The emergence of humor is handicapped by the absence of dialogue (missing element #6). In recent times, writers of travel books have gone to the most sparsely populated regions — Patagonia (Bruce Chatwin) and Siberia (Colin Thubron) — and come back with pages of scintillating dialogue. Even the misanthropic V.S. Naipaul stoops to talk to the locals. Yet in the conventional travel story, no one speaks; reading it is like moving through a landscape of mimes — figures are sensed, sometimes even seen, but almost never heard from.

The absence of dialogue is directly related to the omission of the final and most important element: people. Except for the author and his or her companion, few characters ever clutter the stage of the conventional travel story. Travel journalists may go to the most densely populated cities in the world — Tokyo, Cairo, Mumbai; places where you are immersed in a crush of humanity — and fail to introduce their readers to a single human being. In the history of travel journalism, more has been written about the animals of Africa than the people.

And the question lingers: What can you know — and feel — about a place when you don't meet the people who live in it? We learn through human contact, and the knowledge that we gain is of infinitely greater value than any number of practical tips. Similarly, it is through human contact that we open our hearts. Enlightenment and love — there are no more compelling reasons to travel, or write about it. ■

Thomas Swick is the travel editor of the South Florida Sun-Sentinel and the author of the travel memoir Unquiet Days: At Home in Poland.

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Breaking News Reporting

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Finalists: *Los Angeles Times* staff;
The Star-Ledger staff, Newark, New Jersey

Investigative Reporting

David Willman
of the *Los Angeles Times*

Finalists: Mike McIntire and
Jack Dolan of *The Hartford Courant*;
Fredric N. Tulskey of the
San Jose Mercury News

Explanatory Reporting

Chicago Tribune staff

Finalists: Louise Kiernan
of the *Chicago Tribune*;
The New York Times staff

Beat Reporting

David Cay Johnston
of *The New York Times*

Finalists: Virginia Ellis
of the *Los Angeles Times*;
Rebecca Smith of *The Wall Street Journal*

National Reporting

The New York Times staff

Finalists: Frank Fitzpatrick and Gilbert
M. Gaul of *The Philadelphia Inquirer*;
Chicago Tribune staff

International Reporting

Ian Johnson of *The Wall Street Journal*
and Paul Salopek of the *Chicago Tribune*

Finalist: Maura Reynolds
of the *Los Angeles Times*

Feature Writing

Tom Hallman, Jr.
of *The Oregonian*

Finalists: Robin Gaby Fisher

of *The Star-Ledger*, Newark, New Jersey;
Richard E. Meyer
of the *Los Angeles Times*

Commentary

Dorothy Rabinowitz
of *The Wall Street Journal*

Finalists: Karen Heller
of *The Philadelphia Inquirer*;
Derrick Z. Jackson of *The Boston Globe*;
Trudy Rubin of *The Philadelphia Inquirer*

Criticism

Gail Caldwell of *The Boston Globe*

Finalists: Christopher Knight
of the *Los Angeles Times*;
Jerry Saltz of *The Village Voice*

Editorial Writing

David Moats
of the *Rutland (Vermont) Herald*

Finalists: Laurie Roberts
of *The Arizona Republic*;
Tina Rosenberg of *The New York Times*

Editorial Cartooning

Ann Telnaes
of the *Los Angeles Times Syndicate*

Finalists: Clay Bennett of *The Christian Science Monitor*; Ben Sargent of the
Austin American-Statesman

Breaking News Photography

Alan Diaz of *The Associated Press*

Finalists: Chris Gerald (a pseudonym)
of Agence France-Presse;
Rachel Ritchie of *The Providence Journal*

Feature Photography

Matt Rainey of *The Star-Ledger*,
Newark, New Jersey

Finalists: David Guttenfelder
of *The Associated Press*; Marc Piscotty
of the *Denver Rocky Mountain News*

LETTERS AND DRAMA

Fiction

*The Amazing Adventures of
Kavalier & Clay* by Michael Chabon
(Random House)

Finalists: *Blonde* by Joyce Carol Oates
(The Ecco Press/HarperCollins);
The Quick and the Dead, by Joy
Williams (Alfred A. Knopf)

Drama

Proof by David Auburn

Finalists: *The Play About the Baby*
by Edward Albee; *The Waverly Gallery*
by Kenneth Lonergan

History

*Founding Brothers: The Revolutionary
Generation* by Joseph J. Ellis
(Alfred A. Knopf)

Finalists: *Way Out There in the Blue* by
Frances FitzGerald
(Simon & Schuster);
*The Right to Vote: The Contested History
of Democracy in the United States*
by Alexander Keyssar (Basic Books)

Biography

*W.E.B. Du Bois: The Fight for Equality
and the American Century, 1919-1963*
by David Levering Lewis
(Henry Holt and Company)

Finalists: *The First American: The Life
and Times of Benjamin Franklin*
by H.W. Brands (Doubleday);
*Johann Sebastian Bach: The Learned
Musician* by Christoph Wolff
(W.W. Norton & Company)

Poetry

Different Hours by Stephen Dunn
(W.W. Norton & Company)

Finalists: *Pursuit of a Wound* by
Sydney Lea (University of Illinois Press);
The Other Lover by Bruce Smith
(The University of Chicago Press)

General Non-Fiction

*Hirohito and the Making of Modern
Japan* by Herbert P. Bix
(HarperCollins)

Finalists: *Newjack: Guarding Sing Sing*
by Ted Conover (Random House);
*A Heartbreaking Work of Staggering
Genius* by Dave Eggers
(Simon & Schuster)

Music

Symphony No. 2 for String Orchestra by
John Corigliano

Finalists: *Tituli* by Stephen Hartke;
Time After Time by Fred Lerdahl

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- Akron Beacon Journal
- The (Columbia, S.C.) State
- Lexington (Ky.) Herald-Leader
- The Wichita (Kan.) Eagle
- The Macon (Ga.) Telegraph
- Tallahassee (Fla.) Democrat
- The (Wilkes-Barre, Pa.) Times Leader
- Duluth (Minn.) News-Tribune
- Belleville (Ill.) News-Democrat
- Columbus (Ga.) Ledger-Enquirer
- The (Biloxi, Miss.) Sun Herald

- The (Fort Wayne, Ind.) News-Sentinel
- The (Myrtle Beach, S.C.) Sun News
- Bradenton (Fla.) Herald
- Grand Forks (N.D.) Herald
- The (San Luis Obispo, Calif.) Tribune
- The Monterey County (Calif.) Herald
- (State College, Pa.) Centre Daily Times
- Aberdeen (S.D.) American News
- Warner Robins (Ga.) Daily Sun
- The Olathe Daily News

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American RadioWorks for Massacre at Cuska on National Public Radio

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Teen People

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Rolling Stone

Sports Illustrated

Vanity Fair

(400,000 to 1,000,000 circ.)

The New Yorker

Finalists

Fortune

Gourmet

Jane Magazine

Men's Journal

(100,000 to 400,000 circ.)

Mother Jones

Finalists

Harper's Magazine

Nylon Magazine

Saveur

Texas Monthly

(Under 100,000 circ.)

The American Scholar

Finalists

DoubleTake

Harvard Medical Alumni Bulletin

Nest

Transition

Silver Baton

KHOU-TV, Houston, Texas, and Anna Werner, for *Deadly Tires?*

Soriosis Samura, Insight News TV, London, and CNN Productions for *Cry Freetown*

NBC News Dateline for *Paper Chase*

FRONTLINE and WGBH-TV, Boston, for *John Paul II: The Millennial Pope*, on PBS

Personal Service

National Geographic Adventure

Finalists

Esquire

Money Magazine

Newsweek

The New Yorker

Special Interests

The New Yorker

Finalists

Esquire

The Oxford American

The Paris Review

Texas Monthly

Reporting

Esquire

Finalists

The New Yorker

Rolling Stone

The Texas Observer

Wired Magazine

Feature Writing

Rolling Stone

Finalists

Esquire (two nominations)

National Geographic

Adventure

The New Yorker

Profiles

The New Yorker

Finalists

The Atlantic Monthly

ABC News Nightline for *AIDS in Africa*

National Public Radio for *Radio Expeditions*

KXLY-TV, Spokane, Washington, and Tom Grant for *Public Funds, Private Profit*

WCPO-TV, Cincinnati, Ohio, and Laure Quinlivan for *the I-Team Stadium Investigation*

GQ

The New Yorker

(second nomination)

Rolling Stone

Public Interest

Time

Finalists

The Atlantic Monthly

The New Yorker

Technology Review

Texas Monthly

Design

Nest

Finalists

Entertainment Weekly

Esquire

Martha Stewart Living

W

Photography

National Geographic

Finalists

Esquire

Martha Stewart Living

Nest

Vibe

W

Fiction

Zoetrope: All-Story

Finalists

The Atlantic Monthly

Esquire

GQ

The New Yorker

Steeplechase Films for *New York: A Documentary Film*, on PBS

Crowing Rooster Arts, New York, for *Abandoned: The Betrayal of America's Immigrants*, on WGBH-TV, Boston

CBS News for *Armed America*

Essays

The New Yorker

Finalists

The American Scholar

(two nominations)

Harper's Magazine

Outside

Reviews and Criticism

The New Yorker

Finalists

Gourmet

Harper's Magazine

Sports Illustrated

Vanity Fair

General Excellence Online

U.S. News Online

Finalists

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Roger Ailes: Please Give Bill Clinton His Own Talk Show



BY LAWRENCE K. GROSSMAN

Lawrence K. Grossman, a former president of NBC News and PBS, is a regular columnist for CJR.

In a recent *TV Guide* column, J. Max Robins ("Robins Report") speculated about the prospect of Bill Clinton getting his own TV talk show. Robins, a veteran media trade reporter who writes just about the only serious editorial stuff worth reading in that magazine, pointed out what would seem to be

the obvious. "Despite a barrage of bad press over Pardongate, Bill Clinton still has star power — enough that the next chapter of his career may be written on TV."

Oddly, most of the TV news execs Robins quoted were convinced that Clinton would be a big hit, but on someone else's channel. CBS News president Andrew Heyward, whose network certainly could use a successful new entry, said, "We don't really have a role for him here, but I could see him on a cable news channel." An anonymous official of CNN, now deep in the ratings doldrums, suggested, "If we're not the place, maybe it's Fox News." CNN's Jeff Greenfield wondered, "Is that really the role the president of the United States wants to play?" Only Fox News chairman Roger Ailes jumped at the idea, saying he'd "hire Bill Clinton in a second — if I could afford him," which tells you something about why Fox News is doing so well these days.

Why are so many so skittish about an ex-president, especially this ex-president, getting his own TV show? Surely, it can't be that the medium is too dignified for an ex-president with a somewhat sullied reputation. After all, we've got a sitting governor of Minnesota doing color for smash-mouth XFL football on NBC and an ex-mayor of Cincinnati hosting one of the sleaziest TV syndicated shows of all time.

Or is it actually just the opposite, that television is so déclassé these days that it would be, as Jeff Greenfield suggests, an unseemly comedown for a former president of the United States? Is television really a worse place to live out your post-presidential life than, let's say, serving in the U.S. Congress, or joining the board of a company that buys and sells other companies, or getting fat fees for making speeches at business conventions? President John Quincy Adams ended his days in Congress, where he did some of his greatest and most satisfying work defending the Union against secessionists. William Howard Taft presided over the Supreme Court after leaving the White House and, according to some historians, acquitted himself with rather more distinction as chief justice than as president. Taft said he liked his post-presidential job so much he didn't even remember he ever was president.

In this electronic age, who better to do regular television commentaries about issues of concern to the public than a former president of the United States, especially a smart, articulate former president with obvious star value? And anyway, since when is television so fussy about its stars' personal character? When I ran NBC News, I took a good deal of flak for inviting a discredited former president to make his nationwide public reappearance on *Meet The Press*. Richard M. Nixon's comments on world issues that Sunday were notably insightful, riveting, timely, and well worth all the flak from friends, family, and colleagues.

After leaving the White House, an ex-president can talk more openly and frankly about what's happening in the world and what

needs to be done than he could while he was still in the White House. What better public service can television perform for its millions of viewers than to provide a regular "bully pulpit" for the nation's ex-presidents to offer their own firsthand views on the issues that concern them? On *Larry King Live*, ABC's Ted Koppel worried that Clinton as a TV host would probably overshadow any guest. As anyone who watches *Nightline* can testify, Koppel's own intelligence as an interviewer overshadows many a high-ranking guest on his show. That's not a handicap. It's a plus.

One morning recently, Bill Clinton was spotted in the front row of the Bedford Road Elementary School auditorium watching a school play, "Lost in New York." The students and teachers had invited him. "I had the morning free," the forty-second president of the United States explained. Roger Ailes can give the former president something to do in the mornings while his wife, the senator, is away at work. Roger says he thinks Clinton could be "the next Oprah." Obviously, in our television-tabloid society, Oprah is now the standard by which even presidents of the United States are judged. We could do a lot worse.

Roger, please invite Bill Clinton to join Fox News and talk straight about the major issues of the day. He's bound to give Gerald, O'Reilly, Imus, Howard Stern, Larry King, and all the other fixtures on Fox and on your competitors' channels a run for their money. And if you're right that he is the next Oprah, whatever you have to pay him will be worth the price. Besides, what you end up paying him is sure to reap a rich harvest of free publicity. ■

When Money Talks, Should Public Radio Listen?



BY JUDITH HEPBURN BLANK

Judith Hepburn Blank has worked in public and commercial broadcasting as a producer and host for more than twenty years.

Christopher Lydon, the popular host of the National Public Radio program *The Connection*, lost his job this March in a public and acrimonious stand-off with WBUR, the Boston station that produces the show, over his demand for a very big piece of *The Connection's* pie. The dispute has raised anew the thorny questions about who owns public radio, how it should be funded, and what, ultimately, its mission is — or ought to be.

Describing themselves as “venture broadcasters,” Lydon and his senior producer, Mary McGrath, demanded half of all future revenues generated by *The Connection*, including money anticipated from underwriting fees and Internet syndication. WBUR’s station manager, Jane Christo, refused to make the deal, pointing out that the program was created by and is owned by WBUR, which had hired Lydon. But most important, Christo said, she couldn’t reconcile Lydon’s and McGrath’s demands with public radio’s mission. At one point, during the months of negotiations that ultimately failed, she offered them hefty salary increases and bonuses: Lydon was to go from \$175,000 to \$330,000 and McGrath was to jump from \$100,000 to \$215,000, over the next few years.

In public radio those figures are astronomical, several days’ worth of on-air fundraising marathons at some larger stations. The whole affair is another sign of a new entrepreneurial spirit that seems antithetical to public radio’s original purposes — to serve a variety of communities and provide alternatives to market-driven commercial broadcasting. How did this change come about?

Since 1994, when Newt Gingrich launched the Republican assault on public broadcasting, hoping to do away with it entirely, the amount of government funding has decreased significantly. Forced (like public television) to find other sources of revenue, NPR, Public Radio International (PRI), and member stations have turned increasingly to corporate underwriters. Under looser regulations, these corporate sponsors no longer pay for just an on-air mention, but buy “enhanced underwriting credits,” which plug a company, or a hospital, or even a veterinary clinic, with everything except a “call to action” that would explicitly tell listeners to go out and make a purchase. Enhanced underwriting is bringing in cash. Lots of it.

At WBUR, a huge chunk of revenue now comes from underwriting, some \$7 million a year, or 46 percent of the station’s budget. Another 45 percent still comes directly from listeners. The remaining funding comes from foundations and the Corporation for Public Broadcasting, the entity set up by The Public Broadcasting Act of 1967 to act as a conduit to provide government money to public television and radio — and to keep it free of market pressures.

But market pressures seem to be at work. At New York’s WNYC, where the head of underwriting calls the listeners the “Tiffany audience,” the rates the station charges for commercial spots — I mean, enhanced underwriting credits — were raised nine times in less than three years. Well, public radio needs money, so what’s the problem? Says Larry Josephson, president of the Radio Foundation and an independent producer: “This is an eruption of whether we’re a

business to reel in numbers and money or whether we’re a cause.”

In this new, money-driven public radio culture, local stations want the prestige and the revenues that producing a nationally syndicated program brings. The trend is to play it safe and to provide certain ratings-builders based on demographics, focus groups, and attempts at cloning successful programs. The producer of one nationally distributed program was told that in order to increase the number of stations carrying it, the program would have to change its format, and some of its content, because the program was “foreground” listening. Apparently, “background listening” is less risky.

Certainly excellent programs endure throughout public radio. And new programs continue to come along that are wonderful. But as more and more programs are interrupted with breaks for funding and underwriting credits, the “underwriting anxiety” that research has identified can lead listeners to stop pledging money to their stations. Worse, the reliance on numbers can change the very nature of public radio. It raises the specter that programmers will not take risks in developing or broadcasting anything that is not assured of a large number of listeners. It inhibits creativity.

Public radio should be supported by listeners, by some foundation money, and by a tax on commercial licenses. And revenues from corporate underwriting or sales of program-related items, like cassettes and books, should be plowed back into programming to ensure the high standards and variety of programs that the audience craves. Public radio should remain public. ■

Want to Work as a Editor? Your in Luck



BY ANDREW COHEN

Andrew Cohen is the editor of *Athletic Business*, a monthly trade magazine based in Madison, Wisconsin.

You may as well get used to mistakes like those in that headline. If the résumés and cover letters that have come across my desk in the past year are any indication, we, the print media, are doomed.

I have advertised four open editorial positions for my sports-related trade magazine in the past sixteen

months. Every day during my search for qualified candidates, I'd open my mail with a quiver of excitement that this might be the day that a prospective editor would make it all the way through a two-paragraph cover letter without making errors that demonstrate a) a fundamental lack of knowledge of English or b) the kind of carelessness that you'd really rather not see in someone whose job is primarily to catch other people's errors.

You'd be astonished to learn how many were gone after the first sentence. One guy, the news editor and chief copy editor of his college paper, misspelled the name of the local newspaper in which we ran the ad. Another, a journalism grad who'd "had the opportunity to cover wrestling articles for our award-winning college newspaper," now asked me to "please accept my résumé and cover letter as an applicant for the editor/writer position." Another was a working writer who'd worked for a "Scripts-Howard" newspaper and was now free-lancing features. ("I got some very good interest from several of the weeklies which I did speak with," he wrote.)

Several journalists saved their worst for last. A journalism grad/newspaper writer whose cover letter included thirteen punctuation errors ended it with this memorably penned flourish: "I thought that

your company and me might make for a fairly close fit." Another, who had a B.S. in journalism and six years of editorial experience, wrote a great letter that unfortunately ended with a suggestion: "Let's get together and see if we a match." Sorry — we not interested.

Then I had an epiphany — I'd forget all about journalists and turn to the English majors, whose specialty is reading and comprehension and whose obsession is style. Bad move. It was here that I found a person with degrees in English and linguistics who promised "superb grammar, spelling, and punctuation skills." At least she didn't mention proofreading. Here I found yet another English grad who began his letter, "After finding your ad in the *Wisconsin State Journal*, please find my enclosed résumé." Found it.

If there's a bright spot in all this, it's that my candidates winnowed the field for me. An amazing three of every five I received failed their first test as editors — although they didn't know they were being tested. And what of the clean letters? Since I know these could have been created by cover-letter software complete with spellcheck, I invited surviving candidates to come in and take an hour-long proofreading test that has roughly forty errors in spelling, punctuation, consistency, grammar, and redundancy. Four of five candidates scored below twenty. I also gave a quick ID quiz — twenty names split between current sports and news events. Four of five candidates scored below six. The survivors of this round were given a writing assignment, which most failed.

I've been told by some colleagues, and some candidates, that

my tests are too difficult. Really? Personally, I think the very least we can expect an editor or writer to be able to do is to distinguish between principals and principles, elicit and illicit, liable and libel, perspective and prospective, and council and counsel — which, by the way, spellcheck can't do. I also think that someone who is reporting on events in the world — even in the very small corner of the world covered by my magazine — shouldn't mix up the tennis pro Yevgeny Kafelnikov (ID'ed by one candidate as the "prime minister of Russia") and Slobodan Milosevic ("Guy we were recently fighting — Kuwait").

Whenever I get together with other curmudgeons — and I'm only thirty-nine — we never run out of people and institutions to blame for this sad state of affairs. There's the crappy educational system that pushes out graduate after graduate who can't spell. There are the journalism departments that teach students how to get the "who," "what," and "when" in their leads but fail to note the importance of reading to students' writing. There are the employers who have kept wages at 1960 levels through this time of prosperity, leading to a massive brain drain from the profession.

Whoever you might see fit to blame, publishers are getting desperate. How desperate? Recently, another local publisher hired away my assistant editor, who had a little more than two years of editorial experience, and inserted her right into the top slot at his new magazine — without giving her an editing test. I suspect that if he had, and she again came up with the phrase, "schools must confront debates on recruitment in a new light," they'd have hired her anyway. After all, I did. ■

The School Shootings: Why Context Counts



BY LYNNELL HANCOCK

Lynnell Hancock, a former reporter for the *New York Daily News* and *Newsweek*, writes on education and children's issues and teaches full time at Columbia University's Graduate School of Journalism. Her spring seminar on Covering the Youth Beat can be found at www.jrn.columbia.edu/children/.

The images are horrifying. Children are wheeled out of school on stretchers, while medical workers chase them down pathways with oxygen masks, bandages, intravenous drips. A security officer is slumped in the hallway, his face bloodied by bullet spray. A gangly fifteen-year-old is marched past TV cameras into custody.

This numbing scene was replayed on March 5 from Santana High School in Santee, California. After a young student there allegedly killed two classmates and injured thirteen others, Dan Rather led the CBS broadcast with a sweeping introduction: "School shootings in this country have become an epidemic." Within hours of the California tragedy, MSNBC.com posted a package of stories, including a map of the U. S. that allowed readers to click onto each state's previous violent school incidents. The cover of *Time* trumpeted, "The Columbine Effect," illustrated by a bright blue schoolbag packed with pencils, notebooks, and a revolver.

A national sense of dread took hold, again. Within days, more than thirty children, from New Jersey to Georgia, were either arrested or suspended for making threats that targeted kids or teachers. And beyond threats, a fourteen-year-old Pennsylvania girl shot another student on March 7 in her school cafeteria. At the end of the month, a sixteen-year-old in Gary, Indiana, was shot and killed by a former classmate in their high school parking lot.

It seemed as if no school, no child, was safe from an enraged classmate with a gun and an urge

to kill. Every American teen ambling down the sidewalk with a book bag became a suspect; every student a potential victim. An NBC/*Wall Street Journal* survey post-Columbine found that 71 percent of the people who were polled believed that school killings could occur in their communities.

Is the public's heightened fear based in reality? Or is it exaggerated, fed by saturation media coverage that is painting a distorted picture?

Despite the frightening shootings, from Paducah, Kentucky, to Littleton, Colorado, the numbers support the latter view. From 1992, when the National School Safety Center began keeping records, to 2001, the number of people shot and killed annually in elementary or secondary schools declined from forty-three to fourteen. The drop is not a straight line. During the tragic 1998-99 school year, for example, twenty-four were killed — more than half at Columbine. But the trend clearly shows that death by gunfire in schools is on the decline.

The downward trend also holds true for other school violence statistics kept by the center. When the numbers for total school deaths since 1992 are broken down, the categories for deaths by suicide and deaths for "reasons unknown" hold fairly steady. But "gang-related" and "interpersonal disputes" — the largest categories of causes of death outside "unknown" — show striking declines. Gang-related deaths drop from thirteen to one over the measured years, while deaths from "disputes" drop from eighteen to one. Bullying, an apparent factor in

some of the recent shootings, was a factor in only twelve of the total 295 violent deaths recorded by the center since 1992.

It should be noted, meanwhile, that these 295 deaths occurred in a national school population of 52.7 million. Each American child, then, has only one chance in two million of getting killed on school grounds. With those odds, a student has a greater chance of being exterminated by a stray comet that wipes out the earth.

SCHOOL VIOLENCE WEB RESOURCES

The National School Safety Center

(www.nsscl.org), a nonprofit organization founded in 1984 to prevent school violence, offers a list and analysis of school shootings since 1992.

The National Center for Injury Prevention and Control

(www.cdc.gov/ncipc), an arm of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, includes a report, "Youth Violence in the United States."

The National Threat Assessment Center

(www.treas.gov/usss) published "The Secret Service Safe School Initiative," a report analyzing thirty-seven school shootings involving forty-one perpetrators since 1974.

The Center on Juvenile and Criminal Justice

(www.cjcj.org), a nonprofit organization, analyzes school violence and the media's coverage of it and advocates for alternative solutions to incarceration.

Other research groups support the argument that schools are safe and getting safer. The federal National Center for Education Statistics found that 25 percent fewer children brought weapons to school in 1997 compared to four years earlier. The study reported that "serious crimes" such as rape and sexual and aggravated assault declined 34 percent during the same period. Federal agencies from the Secret Service to the U.S. Department of Justice have released reports saying schools are one of the safest places for children to be.

"Stories about school shootings should mention these trends," argues Vincent Schiraldi, president of the Justice Policy Institute, a research and public policy group based in Washington, D.C. "You wouldn't write a story about Mark McGwire's home run streak without mentioning Roger Maris."

This is a simple matter of context. In its absence, "journalists are scaring the life out of parents and school officials about their violent kids," Schiraldi says. "The truth is, kids are no more violent today than they were twenty years ago. And schools are not the locus of homicide that the media portrays."

Certainly, media coverage of school shootings has significantly increased in column inches and broadcast minutes over the years.

■ In 1974, a seventeen-year-old Regents scholar carted guns and homemade bombs to his upstate New York school, then killed three adults and wounded eleven others from his sniper post on the top floor. *Newsweek* carried only a 700-word story about the mayhem, well inside the magazine.

■ In 1978, a smart, tormented fifteen-year-old in Lansing, Michigan, killed one bully and wounded a second. The story was front-page news in the local *State Journal*. But ninety miles away, the *Detroit Free Press* ran a much smaller story inside its pages.

■ In 1988, a Virginia Beach sixteen-year-old armed himself with a semiautomatic weapon, 200 rounds of ammunition, and three firebombs before entering his Baptist school. He killed one teacher and wounded a second. The Associated Press sent a brief story about the murders over the wire that was picked up without much fanfare by a handful of papers around the nation. *The San Diego Union-Tribune*, for in-

stance, ran a 360-word story on page three.

Neither MSNBC nor CNN existed when those teens opened fire. The national and international media did not descend on victimized towns and schools. Words like "rash of killings" and "epidemic" were not mentioned in the stories. "Epidemic" is exactly the wrong word to use when it comes to school crime in the nineties," says Lori Dorfman, director of Berkeley Media Studies Group, which urges reporters to add context and perspective to every violent-crime story.

Experts like Dorfman argue that real epidemics, which pose far more serious dangers to children than school shootings, go under-covered. Consider child abuse, for example. An average of five U.S. children are killed by their caregivers every day, according to the National Clearinghouse on Child Abuse and Neglect. Life is clearly more dangerous for children outside school walls than within. National education statistics show that, at most, thirty-five children were murdered in school during the 1997-98 academic year, while 2,752 were killed beyond the campus.

Yet the volume and intensity of coverage of modern school shootings focus public attention on children's safety inside school buildings. Many schools respond to this by adopting strict "zero tolerance" policies. New rules require kids to be expelled or suspended for everything from carrying a gun to carrying a nail file. In the wake of Columbine, a six-year-old from Harrisburg, Pennsylvania, was suspended for bringing a toenail clipper to school. A first-grader in Jonesboro, Arkansas, was suspended for aiming a chicken nugget at a teacher and saying, "pow, pow, pow." The Harvard Civil Rights project found that suspensions increased from 1.7 to 3.1 million from 1974 to 1997, and that black and Hispanic children were punished at far greater rates than their white peers.

Not all the coverage has had a punitive effect. Many of the stories led to constructive soul-searching on the part of schools, parents, and communities. Features following the Columbine massacre often tackled the root causes of violence. "More reporters asked why, not just what," says Dorfman, who studied juvenile violence stories for a year after Columbine. The community discussions

went beyond improving law enforcement to such subjects as establishing open school environments, controlling guns, and increasing mental health services for adolescents. Schools developed emergency plans that included aerial maps and a network of counselors.

Santana High School was one of these. Yet after the two children died there, *The New York Times* reported on the following Sunday that Santee's citizens, and the public at large, had become strangely inured to the specter of teens mowing down their fellow students in a hail of gunfire. Reporters James Stern-gold and Jodi Wilgoren wrote that public consciousness had shifted from disbelief to "a macabre sense of expectation and routine." In Santee, police and school officials reportedly were already planning a training video, "to help them get ready for next time."

If the people of Santee believe that the statistically improbable horror that visited them in March is likely to occur there again, then the media have already wreaked significant collateral damage. ■

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BOOKS

In the Lions' Dens

BY WALTER GOODMAN

To the degree that a reporter's success can be determined by his run-ins with employers and sources, with presidents and other politicians, Daniel Schorr's career must rate him some sort of award for contretemps. Whether out of a matter of principle or a case of disposition or indisposition or just inadvertence, the high and low points of his new autobiography, *Staying Tuned: A Life in Journalism*, have to do with his encounters with power.

From the time in 1953 when he was rejected for a job on *The New York Times* because of the paper's brief freeze on hiring more correspondents with Jewish names, to many years later when he was in effect fired from CBS, where he had become the last surviving member of Ed Murrow's fabled team, and then hired and fired by CNN, in whose birth pangs he had shared, he seemed unable to keep a job even after holding it for years, or to part amicably from it. His many encounters with officials of various nations, most notably Richard Nixon, brought him considerable celebrity, and a commotion about the leak of a classified document almost got him a contempt-of-Congress charge from a congressional committee.

As he recounts these matters in his generally engaging memoir, he seems often to have been taken unaware by the way he managed to get involved in recurrent scrapes. Anyway, the good news as far as television journalism is concerned was that at the age of thirty-nine, Schorr found himself covering Moscow for CBS as part of the estimable Murrow team (Sevareid, Smith, Burdett,



Kendrick, Hottelet, Schoenbrun), an experience that serves as a window into the strains and burdens of reporting from the Soviet Union during the Khrushchev era, when the Kremlin was trying to figure out where exactly the line could be found between liberalization and repression. The censors seem to have had as much trouble as the correspondents.

These years, for all their frustrations, make for droll copy. Schorr's greetings from his KGB overseer, an apparatchik of the Soviet Journalists Union named Boris, sets the tone. Boris showed up with a bottle of vodka and proclaimed:

**STAYING TUNED:
A LIFE IN JOURNALISM**

BY DANIEL SCHORR

POCKET BOOKS. 368 PAGES. \$26.95

"Well, Mr. Schorr, here's mud down your hatch!" In his jousting with the censors, Schorr relied on his superior acquaintance with the American idiom. He slipped in his skepticism about the size of an announced Kremlin troop cutback by reporting "Tell that to the soldiers, tell it to the sailors and above all, tell it to the

marines." When the Soviets cancelled a trip to Siberia because of a series of nuclear bomb tests, it gave American correspondents an opportunity to crack in private that they were probably "the first people to be exiled from Siberia."

After a while, Schorr managed to master the rules of the game. He explains: "One could quote speeches calling Stalin 'arbitrary,' but not 'tyrannical.' One could quote a Russian worker who said, 'I still think Stalin was a great man,' but not a taxi driver who said, 'They talk about him that way because he is

dead, but if he were alive . . . ' When I referred to the people under Stalin as 'the long-suffering Russians,' the long-suffering was deleted. When I wrote of Stalin's victims being 'posthumously rehabilitated,' the word posthumously was excised."

Given the shaky Soviet-American relations and his changing assignments, Schorr became by turns a leading Khrushchev watcher, an Adenauer watcher, a Kissinger watcher and, later, a Gorbachev watcher (which gives him an excuse to tell of the Russian who exploded, after waiting on line for hours for a bottle of vodka: "I'm not taking this anymore; I'm going to go and kill Gorbachev." Two hours later, he returned and was asked what happened to his idea to kill Gorbachev. He reported, "Oh, that line was much longer").

When he wasn't being frustrated in Moscow, Schorr knocked around Europe, covering The Netherlands, the Iron Curtain countries and Germany, where he produced vivid accounts of the building of the Berlin wall. He described for listeners to CBS Radio a confrontation of Soviet and American tanks: "So here is

this incredible picture of these war machines pointing flower-festooned guns at each other while cameras grind and Berliners eat pretzels."

In an interview with the East German Communist party boss, Walter Ulbricht, Schorr's questions about Stalinism drove Ulbricht to stalk from the room, a grand made-for-television moment. For his work in Germany, Schorr was awarded West Germany's Grand Cross of Merit. When years later, this gaudy adornment caught the eye of Vice President Bush at a white-tie, "full-decorations" Gridiron affair, Bush turned to his wife and asked, "Barbara, why don't I have any of those?"

It was Schorr's return to Washington in the 1960s that elevated him into the nation's most renowned Nixon watcher. He attributes that accomplishment to his dissent from the prevailingly soft CBS line on Nixon when he criticized the new president's scrapping of President Johnson's war on poverty.

Schorr gives himself high marks for irritating residents of the White House: "... my penchant for probing beneath the surface of things and my visibility on television seemed to generate irritation all the way up to the Oval Office." A clash with Nixon — "this media-hating, paranoid control freak" — may have been inevitable, but he only belatedly realized that his reporting attracted the "hostile monitoring" of the administration and its hatchet man, Patrick J. Buchanan.

Along the way, Schorr reminds us that he was responsible for eliciting one of the great quotes of the age from an interview with Roman Hruska, the ranking Republican on the Senate Judiciary Committee, who defended Harrold Carswell, a rejected Nixon Supreme Court nominee, from the charge of mediocrity. Hruska put it this way: "There are a lot of mediocre judges and people and lawyers. They are entitled to a little representation, aren't they?"

As Schorr recounts his big run-in with the Nixon White House, the FBI was assigned to digging up dirt on him on the highly unlikely pretext that he was being considered for an administration appointment. The story made page one of *The Washington Post*: FBI PROBES NEWSMAN CRITICAL OF PRESIDENT.

Schorr found himself on an "eyes only" list of twenty Nixon "enemies." The list's purpose, as John Dean elegantly elaborated, was to use the federal machinery "to screw our political enemies." Schorr, who became CBS's chief Water-

gate correspondent, calls the episode a precursor to Watergate, "sharing the pattern of illegality, cover-up and eventual unraveling that became the hallmark of the larger White House conspiracy."

This flurry of fame apparently put him on a collision course with his masters at CBS, ending his career there after almost a quarter century. Details of the final confrontation remain controversial. Schorr charges that he was under pressure from the network higher-ups who had reached a deal with the White House to be kinder to Nixon as his resignation approached. He writes that he was turned down for several juicy assignments, only to find himself at the center of a new dispute over the leak to *The Village Voice* of a classified House Intelligence Committee report about C.I.A. activities. When he declined to reveal the source of the leak, he was accused of endangering secret operations and, some critics asserted, of selling an official document for profit. For a time he had reason to fear winding up in jail for contempt of Congress. CBS fudged about coming to his defense.

Whether Schorr was defending the First Amendment or endangering the national security remains an unsettled question, since readers get only his side of the story. His not implausible explanation for the failure of his bosses and colleagues to stand up for him goes like this: "I learned what I should have long since known — that a television network, operating in a regulated environment, concerned about its local affiliates and advertisers, does not display the same First Amendment courage as a major newspaper." He adds that he was fired "in a weird star-chamber proceeding that clearly reflected fear of Congress and the CBS affiliates."

What he calls the "the anti-Schorr faction in CBS" — prominently abetted by Mike Wallace, whose *60 Minutes* report on the leaked-report episode put Schorr in an unfavorable light — carried the day. His consolation, along with a generous buy-out, was finding his name as the definition for "TV reporter" in *The New York Times* Sunday crossword puzzle.

It is understandable that Daniel Schorr should use his book to support his positions in the controversies to which he seems to have been prone, and it is tempting for a reader to cheer him on as the voice of journalistic independence against political and commercial



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THE ELEMENTS OF JOURNALISM

What Newspeople Should Know
and the Public Should Expect

assaults. But in his role of advocate rather than analyst, Schorr deprives the reader of the sort of cool assessments of chronic issues that ought to be high among a journalist's responsibilities. As for his lapses into self-appreciation, they are not becoming, as when he writes about his tendency to make enemies: "It must mean something that, unable to accept the dictates of my bosses, I ended up in confrontations with Bill Paley after a quarter century at CBS and with Ted Turner after six years with CNN." Let others write such blurbs, Dan.

It is all very well for a reporter to shield himself with claims to upholding the First Amendment, but there are other claims, whether of individual privacy or national security, that warrant some solicitude. And there is a temptation for on-screen personalities to stretch their franchises and indulge in editorial writing, polemic and opinion-mongering of various sorts. By wrapping himself in proclamations of superior virtue and attacking the motives of others ("Unable to adapt myself to corporate tugs on the reins"), Schorr ducks issues on which his experience and intelligence might have cast more light.

Still, as things go in television journalism, Schorr takes the high ground in holding out against pressures and temptations to play the corporate game. His periodic troubles, although framed self-defensively, attest to a constitutional independence, much to be valued as network news keeps getting softer and cable keeps getting ever stupider and more strident.

Staying Tuned, like the Schorr career, ends on a somewhat anticlimactic note. There he is, at CNN, once again attributing his falling out with authority to ulterior considerations. (He reports learning that Ted Turner was playing up to conservatives to raise money for an attempt to take over CBS.) Anyhow, after a few years, he was fired, and CNN asked him to give back his satellite dish.

Now in his eighties, Schorr does weekly commentaries for National Public Radio. (For some reason, he neglects to mention that he also writes regularly for *The New Leader*.) He announces, "I have found the promised land." Good luck, but don't bet on how long this happy relationship will last. ■

Walter Goodman is a critic for The New York Times.

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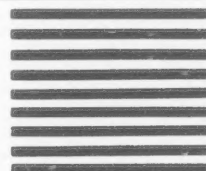
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The Survivor

BY MARVIN KITMAN

Don Hewitt is one of those people with a low threshold of criticism. Anything less than unstinting praise he finds painful. I once made the mistake in a column of finding him a step or two shy of canonization. The next morning he called my office six times trying to correct my error of judgment. He is what we know as a serial phonecaller, relentless in his pursuit of what he calls "sappy TV critics" who didn't get it.

Hewitt will find no fault with *Tell Me A Story*, a candid, incisive, and as self-critical a story as he can take about his first fifty years in television. It's the real Don Hewitt story, as told by Don Hewitt to himself.

As you may guess, it is self-serving to some extent. Basically, it tells us what a great guy he is, and how he has been responsible for some of the greatest moments in television history, including the first Kennedy-Nixon debate in 1960 and the first thirty-two years of *60 Minutes*.

Since his book is an autobiography, he has every right to blow his own horn. Who knows the story better? And, after a half century in TV, in which he candidly admits he "has seen it all and done it all," he has much to be proud of.

He is the founding father of *60 Minutes*, "the most successful program in television history," as he puts it without false modesty. Without doubt, the show has played a major role in TV journalism.

Among other things, it developed techniques widely seen on all magazine shows, such as the use of ambush interviews, characterized by Mike Wallace hiding behind the potted palms, one-way mirrors, hidden cameras, and aggressive questioning. They don't do those ambushes and confrontations as much today, as Hewitt explains. They have become clichés, being so widely used by all his imitators.

The godfather of TV magazines, the Don who made possible *Dateline NBC*, which was seemingly on eight nights a week by 1999, Hewitt also was responsible, in his way, for killing the hour-long documentary, which he cheerfully explains needed a bullet in the back of the head. "People don't like reading docu-

ments. Why would they want to watch something called a documentary?"

Hewitt's perhaps greatest achievement is that he was the first to make news pay — "Maybe two billion over the thirty-plus years" for CBS. He did it by coming up with the notion that journalism could be both compelling and entertaining. The format was inspired, he says, by *Ye Olde Life* magazine. "You'd have a story for a few pages, then some ads, then another story . . . If we split the public affairs hour into three parts to deal with the viewers' short attention span — not to mention my own — I was willing to bet, that we could take informational programming out of the ratings cellar."

In content he would be combining what was called at CBS News "High Murrow" (*CBS Reports*) with "Low Murrow" (*Person to Person*). We could look "into Marilyn Monroe's closet, so long as we looked into Robert Oppenheimer's laboratory, too. We could make the news entertaining without compromising our integrity."

The idea of having multiple reporters had equally humble origins, being inspired by *Four Star Playhouse*, in which Dick Powell, Ida Lupino, David Niven, and Charles Boyer formed a repertory

**TELL ME A STORY:
50 YEARS AND
60 MINUTES
IN TELEVISION**
BY DON HEWITT

PUBLIC AFFAIRS. 304 PAGES. \$26.00

company and each week played different parts. Hewitt's plan was to assemble a rep company of "free-lance journalists, each dedicated to his or her story, but there would be no star out front, no master of ceremonies, no Ed Sullivan introducing the acts."

With all of his candid attributions to other art forms, the fact is the magazine concept Hewitt invented actually had been under everybody's nose. In TV terms, the magazine format dates back to the BBC's *Panorama* with Richard Dimbleby. The first magazine at CBS, anyway, was *See It Now* (1951) on which Hewitt was the studio director — a three-story, half-hour documentary with a staff of reporters. But

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why quibble? Anyway, there is no denying that Hewitt and his team of producers and correspondents do it better than anybody else.

What I liked most about *Tell Me a Story* was that it also tells the story behind a lot of the show's most famous stories, long since forgotten, given our limited attention spans. I found exciting the account of how Morley Safer and his producer, Joe Wershba, blew the whistle on the phony Gulf of Tonkin attack tale, the start of the domino effect in Vietnam, which ended in such disaster. And the postscript, with LBJ phoning CBS president Frank Stanton in the middle of night telling him that "your boys shat on the American flag."

Especially fascinating are the stories about how he assembled his first team, starting with Harry Reasoner, and about how he talked Mike Wallace out of becoming President Nixon's press secretary.

He also tells us about his private life. No, he wasn't born in a log cabin in 1922, but in an apartment in Manhattan. He did not grow up wanting to be network president some day during the Depression in New Rochelle. He is brutally frank about his education: a jock in track, forced to drop out of NYU because "my grades were so lousy." Though he was Jewish, he was never bar mitzvahed. "Being Jewish wasn't a big deal."

He tells about his wild stunts as a competitive TV journalist and how bored he was covering early presidential conventions for CBS News. (His idea of fun was stealing the NBC press book.)

Here again is the tale of how he helped Ed Murrow rebut McCarthy. He reveals how tough he was in his famous Frank Sinatra "No Ground Rules" interview and why Frank felt compelled to say he ought to kill him.

He acknowledges mistakes: he wanted to team Cronkite and Murrow in 1960 to deal with Huntley and Brinkley at NBC; he confesses he was against the thirty-minute news concept; he let the White House strong-arm him into using a CBS interview with JFK to send a message to the government of South Vietnam.

During the Great Red Scare of the 1950s, he doesn't look so good. His defense of Winston Burdett naming names should raise a few hackles; so should his put-down of David Schoenbrun for being a journalist of principle.

But in his view of things, he always

comes out smelling like a rose. He even manages to escape blame for the firing of Meredith Vieira (David Burke done it, he explains). Don Hewitt is the Teflon Man of journalism.

Throughout his life story you see Hewitt as if on a radio beam keeping out of trouble. He didn't let principles stand in his way. He freely admits to making compromises. Everybody has to make compromises with "the Corporation," as he calls management. Otherwise how would they have money to pay everybody's big salaries?

In his fifty years, he's all over the lot politically, philosophically, morally, ethically, as he details — the reason he has stayed alive and managed to survive and prosper in a business where executives have the life expectancy of kamikaze pilots.

All of this is foreplay leading up to the chapter dealing with the Jeffrey Wigand non-story, which some consider not *60 Minutes'* shining hour. He gets a chance to tell the story of the controversy over the movie *The Insider* again, how glorious he and *60 Minutes* acted under the circumstances.

Despite the egomaniacal tendency of the author, Hewitt does a lot of good things in the book. He gives credit to his lieutenants, Phil Scheffler and the late Palmer Williams. He gives credit to producers, who always got co-star billing on stories with the better-paid correspondents. He is lavish with praise for corporate executives like Frank Stanton and Sig Mickelson, a former president of CBS News, who served as heat shields. And he even has a few good words for Fred Friendly, who wasn't one of his favorite people. "Hell, the bastard fired me from the *Evening News* — but he taught me how to tell stories."

Also on the plus side, he has a lot of great advice for neophyte TV journalists, especially about the importance of not getting hung up on pictures. "The best way I know to help people from walking out is to catch their ear even more than their eye," he explains. "Too many people in television forget this."

Hewitt is at his best in the final chapter with his outrageous proposal on how to fix the dying network evening news: pooling coverage. It probably will be called "a lousy idea," as Fred Friendly and others once called *60 Minutes*. ■

Marvin Kitman is media critic at Newsday.

Confessions of a Book Review Editor

BY PAUL BAUMANN

Sigmund Freud thought that every sexual act involved more than two people (think Oedipus). The same can be said of every book review. There is, of course, the primal couple, the author and reviewer. But hidden behind the scenes — and sometimes not so hidden: think of *The New Republic's* Leon Wieseltier — is the book review editor. Bringing books and reviewers together is not glamorous work, but from time to time, an element of (literally bookish) drama and even excitement can be part of the job.

I've been the book review editor at *Commonweal* magazine for eleven years. I love book reviews. I confess to having read far more reviews than books, although in my line of work such philistinism is almost inevitable. I am sent thousands of free books every year, and more than a few (to my wife's exasperation) end up adorning our walls at home. I like the smell of books, the feel and heft of them, and especially the promise that reading, which should first be a pleasure, can also broaden our experience and deepen our lives. Book reviews, then, are invitations to reading, and to something more.

Like any arranged marriage, the pairing of book and reviewer involves matching pedigrees, personalities, and that indefinable attraction that promises a measure of passion on the page. Ultimately, of course, this sort of marriage is all about progeny. Editors are matchmakers willing to put both author and reviewer through interminable agony in order to produce a bright-eyed offspring that will catch and hold the reader's eye.

It took me a few years to get the hang of putting together a book and the right reviewer, and like all matchmakers I'm responsible for my share of sour or merely dutiful marriages. There have been memorable disasters: friends — some of them now former friends — who take every editing suggestion as a personal affront; the well-known author who turns in illiterate gibberish; the writer whose review is so dull that it gets

lost on my desk for three months and I can't remember it when he calls.

The most treacherous challenge an editor faces is reviewing the books of friends or contributors. In these situations, one is always torn between professional integrity and personal loyalty. Publishing a negative review of a friend's book is, as Don Corleone would say, only business, but everyone (understandably) takes it personally.

All editors tell stories about how a bad — or even an insufficiently enthusiastic — review ended a relationship. I've gotten an earful from more than one unhappy author, but surprisingly not much more than that. Jack Miles, who won the Pulitzer Prize for *God: A Biography*, is a good example. We ran an excerpt from Miles's book in *Commonweal* and I also reviewed it glowingly for *New York Newsday*. I was confident that no one who knew the Bible, enjoyed literary criticism, and who possessed a little imagination could dislike the book. With no apprehension, I assigned it to Luke Timothy Johnson, a scripture scholar who taught me in graduate school. (Editing one's old professors is great fun!) I was sure Johnson would appreciate both Miles's immense learning and literary skill. Well, Johnson did appreciate those things, but he also hated the book. His arguments were persuasive enough. I was distressed, but Miles was unfazed, and he continues to write for us. So does Johnson.

One reason for Miles's equanimity might have been that he was an editor at the *Los Angeles Times Book Review* for many years, and knows how the game is played. When things go right, editing the book review section can be like throwing a good party: just the right mix of new faces, old loyalties (and antagonisms), and the tantalizing possibility of something unexpected. I threw a pretty good party in January. The center of it was an important review of the current best-seller, *Constantine's Sword: The Church and the Jews, A History*, by the Catholic novelist and National Book Award winner James Carroll. How that came about may be of interest to inveterate book review readers.

Commonweal is a journal of opinion with a special interest in religion, politics, literature, and culture. Though we have no official connection to the church, we're known as the "liberal Catholic" magazine. The magazine has existed since 1924, and has published such luminaries as W.H. Auden, Graham Greene, and Evelyn Waugh. For us, *Constantine's Sword* was a must-do book. Carroll, a former priest, is an outspokenly liberal Catholic who as a columnist for *The Boston Globe* often advocates for church reform. I knew he had been working on *Constantine's Sword* for several years, and that Houghton Mifflin was likely to push the book hard. Carroll had caused heartburn among some Catholics (including me) with a 1997 *New Yorker* essay about the papacy and anti-Semitism. It was my understanding that the essay, which attributed the Holocaust to "absolutist" Christian claims about Christ's divinity, was the germ of the new book. Carroll's thesis is superficially plausible, but ultimately in my view is a much too simplistic reading of the relationship between ideas and history. Still, he can write, and if *Constantine's Sword* was in fact an extension of the article, I knew it would attract a torrent of praise from reviewers who would rightly appreciate a Catholic's condemnation of church anti-Semitism but were unlikely to grasp the contradictory nature of Carroll's theological agenda. That agenda, I suspected, ultimately was as subversive of Judaism's claims about God as Catholic ones.

So I had my eye out for news of Carroll's 700-page opus, and last September I requested a bound galley from Houghton Mifflin. The publication date was in January, and I would have to get the mammoth text into the hands of a reviewer immediately if we were to publish a review contemporaneously with major magazines and newspapers. At *Commonweal* we can't always time a review perfectly to a book's publication, but doing so — especially with a high-profile book — is a plus.

Houghton Mifflin was prompt. A sheaf of publicity material, including an interview with Carroll, came with the galley. The interview did not assuage my worries about the book's thesis. Who could I get to review this tome, and quickly? I browsed the book's lengthy bibliography to see what scholarship Carroll was relying on, and came upon a reference to Robert Louis Wilken. Wilken, a historian at the University of Virginia, had written a few things for me over the years. He is

conservative, a convert to Catholicism who always seemed to be rushing off on monastic retreat when I called him. His reputation as a scholar is formidable, and his writing accessible to the general reader. He also had an interest in Jewish-Christian dialogue. I knew Wilken was likely to be tough on Carroll, but honest.

Whether to go with a "writer" or a more knowledgeable scholar as reviewer can be a difficult choice, but it's not a choice I often have the luxury of worrying about. When your standard fee is \$100 and your circulation is less than the number of persons working in the average Manhattan skyscraper, people are

not exactly beating down the door to write for you.

How much sway to give my own take on an author or book in selecting a reviewer is a frequent consideration. I work for a journal of opinion, and I have lots of them. But it would be deadly if I chose reviewers on the basis of ideological conformity. As the late Lars-Erik Nelson said: "The enemy isn't liberalism. The enemy isn't conservatism. The enemy is bullshit." That, I think, is the best rule. Whether a reviewer comes from the left, the right, or the middle, a low tolerance for cant and obfuscation is the skill to be prized.

I put down the galley and called Wilken. Getting to him fast was crucial (well, I'm not pretending this was life-or-death crucial, just journalistically crucial). Wilken's reputation made him a likely candidate to review the book for a number of publications.

On the phone Wilken was cool to the idea. He was busy. It was a long book. He didn't know who Carroll was. I told him that Carroll had won the National Book Award for his memoir about his Catholic upbringing (*An American Requiem*), that I was sure the new book was going to get a lot of attention, and that someone like him should examine it. He wanted to take a look at the galley and then decide. I said there wasn't enough time to do that. I didn't want *The New York Times*, *Time*, and the rest to exclusively set the terms of the book's initial reception. Reluctantly he accepted the assignment.

I was pleased — actually, more than pleased. I had wooed a hesitant writer and won him over. I grew even more pleased that we had snared Wilken when, in a subsequent phone call, he told me that the *Los Angeles Times* had asked him — after I did — to do the book. Snatching a reviewer from the grasp of bigger and far wealthier competitors is a bit like going dateless to the prom and coming home with the prom queen.

Now there was nothing left to do but wait.

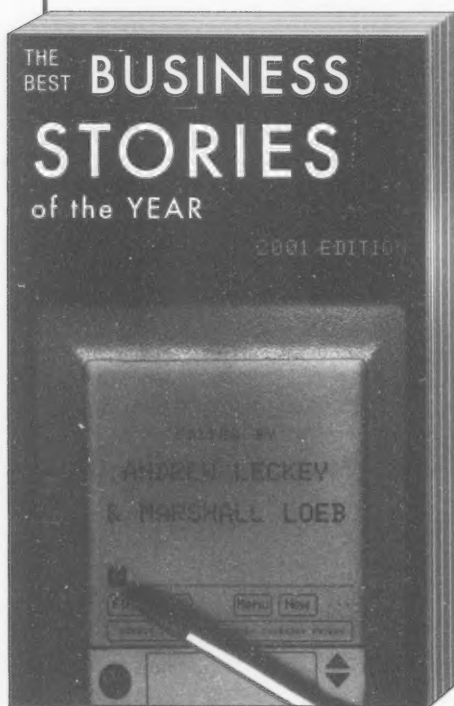
As anticipated, the positive reviews started piling up early. In November, *Publishers Weekly* gave *Constantine's Sword* a starred review. In December, *The Atlantic* hit the newsstands with a rave.

I called Wilken to make sure he was forging ahead and would meet the January 2 deadline. He said he was almost finished reading the book and that he didn't like it much. Actually, he said, it was a "terrible" book.

That remark made me somewhat apprehensive. The last thing I wanted was a diatribe. If Wilken met the deadline, we would barely have time to get the piece into our second issue in January. I'd be in a bind if he sent me a choleric rant or a condescendingly dismissive piece. The subject was too serious and explosive and the broader reception of the book too positive for us to publish a vituperative response. I trusted Wilken's judgment, but when you send out a book for review, you never really know what you'll get back. That's supposed to be the fun part of the job.

Wilken didn't disappoint. On Janu-

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—*Publishers Weekly* (starred review)

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any second, he sent me the review. I read it with growing excitement. Wilken's conclusion addressed exactly the point the mainstream reviews would miss: "What we have then is a rather conventional cultural critique of Christianity," he wrote. "The Jews are the victims par excellence of the excesses of revealed religion. But what Carroll forgets is that the Jews too believe in revelation. If Christians, on the basis of the Scriptures and Christian tradition, cannot confess Jesus as Lord, can the Jews, on the basis of Scriptures and Jewish tradition, claim that they are the elect people of God? In Carroll's brave new world there will be neither Jews nor Christians."

Precisely.

Length was a problem. I had asked for 2,000 words; Wilken sent me 3,500. We decided to make room. I did a little editing and some cutting, mostly of the piece's harsh opening. I wanted readers sympathetic to Carroll to get to the substantive objections raised in the body of the review and not be put off by Wilken's sometimes indignant tone.

While we waited to go to press, a review appeared in *The Boston Sunday Globe* by Paul Wilkes, a progressive Catholic writer, who endorsed Carroll's book unequivocally. A few days later, on January 10, I joined a crowd at New York's Interfaith Center to hear Carroll, along with the novelists Mary Gordon and Cynthia Ozick, talk about the book. Listening was agonizing. I felt like shouting, Wait, you have to read our review! You're all missing the point!

Then, on January 14, *The New York Times Book Review* published a front-page review of *Constantine's Sword* by Andrew Sullivan, a former editor of *The New Republic*. A dextrous writer with a polemical edge, Sullivan noted the strengths of Carroll's book, while shrewdly detecting some of its flaws. Still, Sullivan's demurrals were but a brief aside in an otherwise positive notice.

It may seem presumptuous for an editor at an obscure journal with a circulation of 21,000 to put himself in the company of newspapers and magazines with millions of readers. But editors at small journals like *Commonweal* like to think that, despite modest circulation numbers, what they print can have an impact on the larger conversation. And it does happen. With Carroll about to start a nationwide publicity tour, we'd sent around advance copies of Wilken's piece.

As a result, Christopher Lydon, then host of the NPR show, "The Connection," seemed to press Carroll with some of the questions raised by Wilken. The review also entered into the conversation when Carroll spoke at Harvard Divinity School, where he had worked on the book while on a fellowship.

By January 16 — at last — the Wilken review was on its way to the printer. Will all this Sturm und Drang make a difference in how Carroll's book is received and his arguments understood? A little, I hope. For me, the press of getting the review out had some of the excitement of breaking a news story, which is what I did

(every so often) on a daily paper before taking up the job of book review editor. And, when it was all done, there remained the satisfaction of knowing that I'd helped midwife an honest and challenging review, and that a perspective that otherwise might not have made its way into print was now out there in the world.

In the meantime, have I had a chance to read *Constantine's Sword*? I'm afraid I've read only parts of it. Will I read the whole thing? That depends. But I have read the reviews. ■

Paul Baumann is the executive editor of *Commonweal* magazine.

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The Citi Journalistic Excellence Award is a mark of distinction and professionalism for business journalists around the world. Now in its 20th year, the program has recognized over 250 journalists from more than a hundred media in 32 countries.

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BOOK REPORTS

BY JAMES BOYLAN

FREE SPEECH, "THE PEOPLE'S DARLING PRIVILEGE": STRUGGLES FOR FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION IN AMERICAN HISTORY

By Michael Kent Curtis
Duke University Press. 520 pp. \$32.95

Michael Kent Curtis argues in this rich and original study that the guarantees of free speech that we now credit to twentieth-century court decisions were not originally won in the courts, but in "the forum of public opinion." In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, he writes, popular protest and the press anticipated judicial doctrine. Curtis, a professor of law at Wake Forest University, recounts struggles from the Sedition Act of 1798 through Lincoln's suppressions of free speech during the Civil War. At the heart of the book is the arduous battle for free speech about slavery, fought against the South and its northern allies, who resorted to repression and violence to bar discussion of the peculiar institution from all forums — not only the press but the halls of Congress. Curtis reminds us that this "darling privilege," as free speech was sometimes called in the eighteenth century, did not come cheap and survived only because press and public ultimately realized the principles at stake.

FIRESIDE POLITICS: RADIO AND POLITICAL CULTURE IN THE UNITED STATES, 1920-1940

By Douglas B. Craig
The Johns Hopkins University Press.
362 pp. \$45

A good many historians have been recently raking over the ground covered by this book, among them (as the author notes) Robert McChesney, Michele Hilmes, and Susan Smulyan. Not surprisingly, parts of Craig's work sound familiar, especially his account of the creation of a federal regulatory structure that became the broadcasting industry's best friend. But he provides fresh material on the use of radio by political parties and on radio's cultural impact. In the end, he rejects

radio "exceptionalism," as he calls the idea that radio transformed American politics and culture, in favor of the idea that American society absorbed radio and adapted it to its uses. Craig is an Australian scholar specializing in American history; the only sign of his origin in this work is his use of "GEC" for "GE," as the General Electric Company is known to most Americans.

PRIVILEGED SON: OTIS CHANDLER AND THE RISE AND FALL OF THE L.A. TIMES DYNASTY

By Dennis McDougal
Perseus Publishing. 526 pp. \$35

This is an entertaining, even glib, retelling of the saga of the family that owned the *Los Angeles Times* and, in a sense, Los Angeles itself for a good share of the last 120 years. The author concentrates on the era from 1960 to 1980 when Otis Chandler, of the fourth generation of the owning dynasty, a thirty-two-year-old with the image of a mere jock, took charge of transforming the *Times* from despicable to admirable, and expanded the owning company, Times Mirror, into a media giant. McDougal, formerly an investigative reporter at the *Times* and the author of a number of fact-crime books, evidently had access to Otis Chandler himself and others close to him, and recounts how, in private life, he remained an extreme athlete, even at the cost of extreme damage to his person. The book covers much of the same ground as the more trenchant *Thinking Big*, by Robert Gottlieb and Irene Wolt (1977), but adds the twenty-four critical years that saw the expulsion of Otis Chandler, the moral collapse of the company symbolized in the notorious Staples Center affair, and its termination when it was sold to the Tribune Company last year.

VOYEUR NATION: MEDIA, PRIVACY, AND PEERING IN MODERN CULTURE

By Clay Calvert
Westview Press. 274 pp. \$25

Still another "Nation" title, and who knows what it is supposed to mean any more? Anyway, the book is

better than the title. Clay Calvert, a professor of communications and law at Penn State, traces a continuum leading from the upskirt peepers who display their photos on the Internet through talk-show exhibitionism and cop videos to deceptive and intrusive investigative reporting. He calls it all "mediated voyeurism" — that is, revelation of matters not originally intended for public consumption but offered commercially via one medium or another because (a) it is cheap and (b) people will watch. He even speculates on how the First Amendment, given recent indicative decisions, might be retailored to protect a voyeuristic value, leaving in its wake the shards of an already enfeebled law of privacy.

THE SLATE DIARIES

Edited by Jodi Kantor, Cyrus Krohn,
and Judith Shulevitz
PublicAffairs.
376 pp. \$14

Michael Kinsley, editor of *Slate*, the almost five-year-old online magazine owned by Microsoft, explains in his introduction that these diaries differ from predecessor literary "diaries" in that the diarist was committed to filing by e-mail each day and was supposed to provide the spontaneity of "what-I-did-yesterday." And in fact some of the entries respond to that interesting idea. But many do not. Two-thirds of the diarists are professional writers of one kind or another and cannot get over the habit of doing well-shaped little essays. Others are from professional or business elites — e.g., Bill Gates of Microsoft — and recast their office calendar in narrative form. A few — a school nurse, a surgical resident, an unnamed and untenured junior professor — offer a glimpse of the candor and offhandedness that might have been. But *Slate* apparently has a difficult time unearthing the unrich and unfamous.

James Boylan is founding editor of CJR and professor emeritus of journalism and history at the University of Massachusetts-Amherst. He is writing a history of Columbia's journalism school.

Diseased Animals Enter U.S. Food Supply



Sick, incapacitated animals like this cow are allowed to enter the U.S. food supply.

Downed animals, farm animals too sick even to stand, are used for human food - causing intolerable animal suffering and threatening human health.

Downed animals linger for hours or days without receiving food, water, or veterinary care, and many are left to die of neglect. When downed animals are moved, they are commonly dragged with chains or pushed with tractors or forklifts - painful procedures

which cause injuries ranging from bruises and abrasions to broken bones and torn ligaments.

In addition to causing animal suffering, using downed animals for food raises serious human health concerns.

Besides the risk of bacterial contamination, there is evidence that some downed animals may be afflicted with a form of BSE (Bovine Spongiform Encephalopathy or "Mad Cow Disease"), a disease which has been linked to human fatalities.

Farm Sanctuary has petitioned the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) and the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) to prohibit the use of downed and diseased animals for human food. The FDA is currently reviewing the matter, but USDA denied the petition stating that, "[laws, regulations] and past practices clearly provide for the slaughter and processing of diseased animals for human food." Despite this statement, however, USDA recently stopped buying meat from downed cattle for the National School Lunch Program.

Please write to the Food and Drug Administration, and urge them to grant petition 98P-0151/CP1 to prohibit the slaughter of downed animals for human food. (PLEASE

NOTE: It is critical to refer to docket number 98P-0151/CP1 in your letter.)

Please write:

**U.S. Food and Drug Administration
Dockets Management Branch**

5630 Fishers Lane, Room 1061

Rockville, MD 20852

FAX: (301) 827-6870

E-mail: FDADockets@oc.fda.gov

Please send to: Farm Sanctuary, P.O. Box 150, Watkins Glen, NY 14891

"I support Farm Sanctuary's work to prevent the slaughter of downed animals. Enclosed is my tax deductible donation of \$_____."

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Address _____

For more information please see www.nodowners.org or www.farmsanctuary.org.



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Press Seminars on Health Policy

The United States spends 14 percent of its gross domestic product on health care, the highest health-care expenditure in the world. Yet people in the United States actually have a shorter life expectancy than people in many other developed countries, and they are less satisfied with their health system. Unlike people anywhere else in the industrialized world, a large proportion of Americans —nearly 43 million, or one in six — have no health insurance.

Health care is an important issue for journalists, not just as a financial story, or one of government policy, but because it affects nearly everyone at some point. From birth to death, from protecting children from guns to caring for aging parents, health care is a big story.

But it is not always an easy story to cover. A good health-care journalist must be able to dis-

sect the scientific issues underlying recommendations for cancer screening, probe the financial concerns about covering prescription drugs for Medicare patients, feel the human aspects of what it means to die with dignity, and explain the political machinations that swirl around all these issues. Because of the importance of health policy in our economy, in our everyday lives, and in our politics, the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation and the Columbia University Graduate School of Journalism have sponsored a series of health policy seminars, held over breakfast, with some of the leading health policy experts in North America. Eleven topics were chosen because of their timeliness and their importance. The programs were well attended by New York-area journalists as well as experts in the various fields, provoked lively discussions, and received much favorable comment.

This summary and resource guide was prepared by Lynn Payer, J'69, program director for the Press Seminars on Health Policy. Ms. Payer has written extensively on health and medicine, including the books *Medicine & Culture* (Holt) and *Disease Mongers* (Wiley), as well as numerous magazine and newspaper articles. She is editor and publisher of the newsletter *Medicine & Culture Update*, and has lectured on cross-cultural medicine in Europe, Australia, and the United States.

Brief summaries of key points made at each seminar can be found on pages 89-93. Full contact information and references are included on pages 93-95, and full audio recordings are available at our Web site at www.jrn.columbia.edu/health-policy. You will need RealPlayer, which can be downloaded from the site.

N.B. The summaries pertain to the situation and comments made at the time of the breakfasts, which may have changed somewhat in the intervening months.

Is Dr. Kevorkian Killing the Good Stories on Death and Dying?

January 26, 1999

"Dr. Kevorkian was able to hijack the press, getting it to frame the issue as he wanted, as a stark choice for or against euthanasia."

— Joseph Turow

At the time of this seminar, Dr. Jack Kevorkian, "Dr. Death," had just helped Thomas Youk, who suffered from Lou Gehrig's disease, kill himself. The doctor made a videotape of the death, later aired by "60 Minutes." The program, as well as previous coverage of Kevorkian, had generated much public comment and debate. The coverage usually presented the issue as a stark dichotomy, a choice between dying a prolonged, painful death hooked up to machines, or going to Kevorkian. Lost in the debate was the middle ground: that with proper pain management and other supportive care, death need not be so awful.

Joseph Turow: A content analysis looking at headlines, ledes, and bodies of stories that mentioned Dr. Kevorkian showed that the press framed this story first as a crime story, second as a story about the strange personality of "Dr. Death." The press did not bring the public into the larger policy debate, and most end-of-life issues were hardly covered at all. When opinions were discussed, they tended to stick to Dr. Kevorkian's approach to the topic, even when disagreeing with him.

Janet Heald Forlini: People are hungry for information about death and dying, and there's no question that the coverage of Kevorkian was bad news. The relationship between Kevorkian and his "patient" was not a true doctor-patient relationship, and there was no discussion of various options such as pain management. The good news is that the public is beginning to talk about this issue.

Kathleen Foley: Pain can be effectively treated in 90 to 95 percent of terminally ill patients, yet many doctors don't know how to treat pain, or to manage other symptoms. Doctors also need much more experience in talking to patients. But patients often don't want to talk to their doctors about dying because they're afraid the doctor will give up on them, so the discourse has to be public.

Marilyn Webb: Today is one of the best times in history to be a journalist covering issues of death and dying. This is particularly a women's story. But when covering the story, look at the issues in depth, because they are so complicated. The story is not that Jane Doe takes her case to court, but *why* she takes her case to court.

Should Patients Be Able to Sue Their HMOs? A Debate.

March 2, 1999

"Before basing your views on the anecdotes, take a closer look at them."

— Richard Smith

The United States is known as a litigious society, but one group of institutions — health insurance groups — remain mostly immune from lawsuits. This protection is provided by a statute known as ERISA (Employee Retirement Income Security Act). Passed in 1974, the legislation was intended to protect employee benefit plans from abuse and mismanagement and to provide a uniform set of rules. Courts have interpreted ERISA as limiting damages to the cost of the treatment denied, not allowing any awards for pain and suffering or for punitive damages. ERISA covers most people whose insurance is purchased by their employers, or those in a self-insured plan, and it preempts state laws. The right to sue has been a pivotal issue in the various proposed patients' bills of rights.

Richard Smith: Managed care improves quality by trying to prevent patients from receiving unnecessary and dangerous procedures, and the right to sue would interfere with this ability. Malpractice suits are a poor way to improve quality. Nobody knows what it would cost in terms of premiums were patients allowed to sue. Journalists, when evaluating different estimates, should look at how the estimates were made.

Ron Pollack: When ERISA was enacted, it made sense since people usually received the service first and then went into issues of whether insurance would pay for it. Now, with managed care, they may be denied the service altogether, so simply awarding them the costs of the procedure will not make them whole. Suing should not be the first recourse, but we need some deterrent to keep HMOs from denying care for the wrong reasons. The worst penalty HMOs face for denying care is that they may have to pay for it later. This is not a strong enough incentive to keep them doing the right thing.

Grading the Health-Care Report Cards: Are the 'Best' Hospitals Really the Best?

April 20, 1999

"We as consumers tend to be skeptical of the numbers the government produces...but not when they are mortality reports for hospitals."

— Lisa Iezzoni

Ratings of doctors, health plans, and hospitals make big news, particularly in those communities where a given hospital or doctor ranks particularly low. They are also seen as a way of empowering consumers to make better health-care choices. But critics of these ratings have charged that they mislead the public. Since measuring the quality of medical care is difficult, they argue, all the ways of measuring are subject to errors. One critic of the *U.S. News Best Hospitals* issues has written that "the survey (is) little more than a feedback loop that allows fame to be perceived as quality." When Bruce Vladeck became head of the Health Care Financing Administration, he stopped releasing the tomes of crude data about hospital mortality rates, saying, "I would rather release no data than crummy data."

Avery Comarow: When we started issuing lists of the best hospitals, we were the only ones doing this. If we find someone who can do it better, we'll cede the territory. We rank on three parameters: the reputation, the mortality, and the technology. We don't rank specialties that don't have mortality, such as rehabilitation medicine. This method is not bulletproof, but I get lots of very emotional telephone calls from people telling me how much they appreciate our doing this. But when I had a recent cardiac-bypass operation myself, it was not in one of *U.S. News' Best Hospitals*.

Lisa Iezzoni: Reporters should understand a bit about the methods used to rank hospitals and doctors. First, where does the data come from? Data from medical charts is most valid, but it is expensive to get. As a consequence, most data is obtained from hospital discharge records, suspect because they are primarily used for payment purposes. Mortality has to be adjusted for factors outside the providers' control, such as older or sicker patients. Some hospitals will try to "game" the system by coding their patients as sicker, thereby making their rankings look better. An alternative way of measuring quality is to look at attributes of providers, such as whether a hospital has in place systems that will prevent mistakes. Providers who do more of a given procedure usually have better outcomes, so volume of procedures can be useful knowledge.

Mark Chassin: You can look at outcomes, such as mortality, or process, such as procedures in the hospital. The problem looking at process is that most of the things done in hospitals have never been linked to better outcomes; the problem with looking at outcomes is that there must be ways to change the process to get better outcomes. When New York State started to publish mortality rates for coronary artery bypass surgery, we then



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went back to the hospitals with the highest mortality, found out what they were doing wrong, and helped them correct it. Now New York has the lowest mortality of any state for this procedure. Some of the New England states have done this secretly, but New York needed the two-by-four of public attention.

Covering Long-Term Care: A Story for the 21st Century.

October 26, 1999

If you think about welfare programs ...we think that they should cover a small minority of the population. But when you turn to long-term care, with two-thirds of people on Medicaid, it is welfare for the many."

— Joshua Wiener

About half of all women and a third of all men currently 65 and older will enter a nursing home some time in the future. This care will be costly: the average cost of a year in a nursing home in New York state is \$73,000. Medicare covers only a fraction of these costs — 100 days in a nursing home under some conditions, some home health, hospice and skilled care. In 1997, Medicaid paid for 48 percent of nursing home care. To qualify for Medicaid in New York State, an individual must have spent all of his or her assets down to \$3,550 — and can keep no more than \$50 a month of any income. In addition to nursing homes, an estimated 22 million people give unpaid care to a relative or friend who is at least 50 years old. Were these caregivers to be paid at market value, their services would be worth \$196 billion, far more than is given to formal home health care (\$32 billion) or nursing home care (\$83 billion).

Carol Levine: Most long-term care is provided at home by family members. Even though most expenses are not covered either by private insurance or Medicare, money is not the main problem — lack of information is. You get more information from a pet store on how to care for your newly purchased pet than you get on how to care for your loved ones. Caregivers want someone to guide them through the system. They want someone to talk to and a good night's sleep.

Dean Rosen: Most people hold the mis-

taken belief that either private insurance or Medicare will pay for their long-term care needs. In fact, most is paid by Medicaid, and Medicaid is the ultimate high-deductible policy, since to access Medicaid a person must deplete all income and assets. While only about one in five Americans holds long-term care insurance, it is a way to protect assets against this spend-down. In contrast to health insurance, most long-term care insurance is purchased through individual policies. We advocate an above-the-line tax deduction. The amount lost in taxes would more than be made up by the money that private insurance could save Medicaid.

Joshua Wiener: Private long-term care insurance is very expensive and at the age where you're interested it's not affordable and the age when you can afford it you're not interested. Tax credits would be a limited incentive since half of the elderly pay no income tax. We need to think about moving toward non-means-tested public programs. Welfare programs should only have to cover a small proportion of the population, but long-term care welfare covers the majority. Long-term care may hit the public agenda quickly since the baby boomers now have parents in the system.

Should Medicare Offer a Prescription Drug Benefit Package?

November 16, 1999

"Medicare beneficiaries are the only group of insured Americans paying retail prices for their drugs. They are subsidizing drugs costs for the rest of the world." — Bruce Vladeck

Unlike many private insurance plans, Medicare does not cover the costs of outpatient prescription drugs, and only 3 of 10 Medigap policies provide some such coverage. This occurs at a time when overall spending on pharmaceuticals in the United States almost doubled, from \$49 billion in 1992 to \$93 billion in 1999. To remedy this situation, President Clinton proposed that Medicare offer a prescription drug benefit package, which he said would cost \$118 billion over 10 years; the Congressional Budget Office estimated a cost 42 percent higher, at \$168 billion.

Michael Gluck: As in the case of medical needs in general, most people in a given year have relatively modest prescription drug costs while a small proportion have much larger ones. About half of Medicare beneficiaries paid under \$200 out-of-pocket for prescription drugs in 1999, but 4 percent spent \$2,000 or more. Some seniors get coverage from HMOs, which use prescription drug benefits as a selling point, but the HMOs may subsequently change the coverage or pull out of Medicare altogether. Medigap policies that do provide prescription drug coverage tend to be enormously expensive, since they attract sicker patients. The major questions in designing a Medicare benefit are: Who is eligible? Who pays? And various issues of deductible.

Bruce Vladeck: The answer is a resounding "yes." It is inconceivable, in this day and age, to provide quality medical care without covering drugs, and while this will be expensive, it's not whether we can afford it, it's whether we are willing to afford it. Moreover, the pharmaceutical industry needs the prescription drug benefit, because it risks having a supply of products with no effective demand because people won't be able to afford it. Nearly all suppliers to Medicare do quite well financially.

Judy Bello: Historically the pharmaceutical industry has opposed the benefit, fearing price controls. This fear is not unfounded, since nearly every country or government program that covers prescription drugs does control prices in one way or another. The industry has changed its position, however, and now supports expanding coverage consistent with "our principles," containing costs through choice and competition in the private sector.

America's Uninsured: The Search for Solutions.

February 29, 2000

"Medicare was passed when one party dominated Congress and the Presidency. Until there's one party in both houses and a President of the same party in the White House, any sort of massive change isn't going to happen."

—Chip Kahn

Nearly 43 million Americans do not have health insurance. In New York State, 3.1 million residents — one in six — are uninsured. The uninsured see doctors less often than the insured, and they have worse health outcomes, with more uninsured women dying of breast cancer and more uninsured people with asthma or diabetes

likely to be hospitalized. The uninsured also cost taxpayers money. In 1997, the last year for which figures were available, New York City hospitals spent \$1.215 billion on charity care and bad debt. The three seminar participants, each representing major constituencies, came together to see if they could find common ground for solving the problems of the uninsured.

Chip Kahn: We need to expand our current employer-based system. It is in place, and it works for many people. The reason that people are uninsured is that they can't afford it: tax incentives for employers and government vouchers for the neediest should help solve the problem.

Thomas Reardon: While what's in place should not be disrupted, there should be a shift to defined contributions, which would give employees more choice about which insurance plan they choose, since 60 to 70 percent of insurers offer only one plan. There should also be a basic benefits package.

Ron Pollack: If I were constructing a health system today, I wouldn't make it employer-based. But if we try to move now to an individual system, we may actually lose coverage. Getting universal coverage is a daunting, difficult task that will require redistribution of resources, and we as a nation are not very good at this. We should take a first step that will move us in the right direction, and this first step should be directed at those who fall under 200 percent of the poverty level, which includes more than half the uninsured. Low-wage workers are much less likely to have health insurance at their workplaces, will have to pay more for it in absolute terms, and have less discretionary income with which to do so.

Election 2000: Decoding the Politics of Health Care.

March 28, 2000

"Most voters don't have a clue on where senatorial and house candidates stand on health issues."

— Robert Blendon

The percentage of voters who consider health-care issues of prime importance has declined since 1994, when over half the public cited health care, excluding Medicare, as either the Number 1 or Number 2 election issue. In a poll conducted in December, 1999 by the Henry J. Kaiser Family Foundation and the Harvard School of Public Health, only 28 percent of registered voters — 23 percent of Republicans, 33 percent of Democrats, and 27 percent of independents — defined health care as their

first or second priority, and those voters were thought to be less likely than others to vote in 2000. The same poll found that a plurality of voters, 28 percent, thought George W. Bush would be the best candidate on health-care issues.

Robert Blendon: No single health-care issue dominates voter concerns, with the future of Medicare first, a Medicare prescription drug benefit second, the uninsured third, and the patient bill of rights fourth. Too many details in a news story will not interest voters, and using figures such as a proportion of the poverty line will not inform since most voters do not understand what the poverty line is. What voters would like to know is whether the candidate has given serious thought to the issue, the magnitude of the proposed change, and to be reassured that the reform will not be too expensive.

Ed Goetas: The American public very clearly feels that health care is a right, not a privilege, but at some point health care will be doomed to failure because at some point you're going to die. People who feel the country is on the right track will focus on economics; those who feel it's on a wrong track on morals. When voting for a president or governor, voters focus on leadership; when voting for senators on intelligence.

Celinda Lake: While there's no one single health-care issue, people tend to vote their interests, so one of the hottest issues will be the patients' bill of rights, which 78 percent feel will affect them. Voting America is overwhelming insured America, and 76 percent of American voters say they personally know no one who is uninsured. Prescription drugs will also play a role, and Democrats can gain a lot of points by saying they will refuse all contributions from pharmaceutical companies. Since they don't get many contributions from pharmaceutical companies, they aren't losing much.

Medical (mis?) Information on the Internet: The Medium and the Messages.

April 25, 2000

"Even if we believe in assessing the quality of information, most of our experience comes from text-based information. We often say that a picture is worth a thousand words but we don't really know this. We don't have any mechanisms to judge the quality of information that goes beyond text, the quality of sounds and images and interactivity. You cannot follow the funding trail anymore."

—Alex Jadad

Health journalists spend their careers learning how to evaluate information. Many evolve from credulous believers that all medical information is equally valid to critical appraisers: Was the study controlled? Was it randomized? Is the journal peer-reviewed? Was there a conflict of interest? Are risk figures given as absolute risk as opposed to relative risk, and what does that mean?

The quality of medical information has always been a problem in print and broadcast media, but the Internet, with its lack of gatekeepers, has magnified the problem. One study of Internet sites about how to treat a child's cough found that "If a user were to treat a cough in a child using the information found in the web pages with the highest technical aspect, the advice he/she would be following would be for the most part incorrect."

Humphrey Taylor: As of a few months before the seminar, 80 million Americans had looked for health-related information on the Internet in the past 12 months. People tend to look for information about diseases that they might be embarrassed to bring up with their doctor, and depression rated tops. Practically no one communicated with their physician via e-mail. Physicians on average spent 6 hours a week online, 15 percent of the time for general clinical information and 8 percent of the time on clinical work for patients.

Bruce Dan: All the commercially traded health Web sites are now below their public offering prices, and many of these companies are hurting financially. For them to exist in a commercial environment, they might have to do some things that might put their agenda more solidly in the ranks of financial security than accurate information. It's often very difficult to determine when a Web site has a particular bias or agenda. One Web site on toxic shock syndrome only made a brief mention at the very end that toxic shock had been linked to the use of tampons. It was sponsored by a company that made tampons.

Alex Jadad: Quality is in the eye of the beholder; at the end of the day, people will believe what they want to believe. The best review of the literature on breast cancer screening says that screening doesn't save lives, yet people continue to screen because this contradicted our prior belief. The more rigorous the research, the less attractive the message. The technical progress is amazing. Computers can now transmit all five senses, including smell. One doctor has concocted a wearable computer that can deliver information on 40 different systems.



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The Power Brokers of New York City's Health Care.

September 26, 2000

"Coverage of this subject can run as an Albany story, off the New York City health beat, as a U.S. government story, or as a U.S. business story. It is difficult to tell the totality of this story. Journalism has become much better at describing the problem. Journalism is having a much harder time telling the solution story."

— James R. Tallon, Jr.

New York City's health care differs from that of the rest of the country in many important ways. The city has a higher proportion of people on Medicaid, and a high proportion of those who hold no health insurance. New York has longer hospital stays and trains 10 percent of the nation's physicians. Health care accounts for 20 percent of the city's gross domestic product and generates \$1 billion in tax revenue for the city.

James Tallon: Around 27 to 28 percent of people in New York City have no health insurance — a much higher percentage than in the rest of the country — due to a decline in employer-based coverage as well as a decline in Medicaid. While the city has tried to do a lot to solve the problem, the solutions have been fragmented, program by program, and a lot of people who would be eligible for coverage are not in the programs. Other challenges in the city include its extreme diversity.

Martin Arrick: The vast majority of hospital revenues in New York City come from the public sector: 45 percent of net revenue is from Medicare, 26 to 27 percent from Medicaid, and 5 to 6 percent is uncompensated care, the cost of which is ultimately born by public funds. A huge legacy of rate regulation keeps income margins low, at about 1 percent, impeding capital expenditure, since hospitals need robust cash flow as well as debt capacity. While the cost per day is not higher in New York than elsewhere, the average length of stay is about two days longer, resulting in higher overall costs.

Jo Ivey Boufford: For historical reasons, hospitals dominate the New York health-care scene, with primary care in a relatively

weak position. In recent years there have been a number of battles between payers and hospitals and employees, with the hospitals (Greater New York Hospital Association) and employees (Local 1199) forming a comfortable coalition. The downside to the hospital and employee coalition is the weakness of the non-hospital sector, and a lack of attention to safety-net institutions.

Does Press Coverage of Celebrity Health Improve the Public's Health?

October 24, 2000

"In the one-minute soundbite with a celebrity you can get across the message that mammography is associated with better survival, but you can't get across the message that mammography is not perfect, that not all early detection can save lives, and that there is a downside to mammography that women may not be prepared to deal with."

— Robert Smith

When celebrities go public with their health problems, they can provide powerful role models for those suffering from the same diseases, and they can help fund-raising efforts. They can also change the health behavior of others. When Ronald Reagan was diagnosed with colon cancer, calls to the National Cancer Institute's Cancer Information Service as well as screening tests for colon cancer increased; and when Nancy Reagan opted for a mastectomy instead of breast-conserving surgery for her breast cancer, the number of women receiving breast-conserving surgery dropped by one-quarter for the next six months.

But when celebrities urge people to go for cancer screening, many oversell what screening tests can do, and their cancer "education" efforts, undoubtedly made in good faith, can backfire. The three panelists were given scenarios to critique: that of Betty Ford's breast cancer, Mayor Rudolph Giuliani's and Bob Dole's prostate cancers, and Katie Couric's promotion of colonoscopy after her husband's death from colon cancer.

Barron Lerner: When Betty Ford went public about her breast cancer in 1974, there was a crying need to bring the issue into the open. There was a lot of undiscovered breast cancer

out there, which is why the incidence of the disease increased so dramatically following Ford's diagnosis. Betty Ford did not promote any particular screening test. Prostate cancer screening has been driven by activists who resent all the money that breast cancer gets. Giuliani held back to some degree, keeping his decision-making private, which I regard as a healthy development. With Katie Couric we've come full circle, since she advocates a specific screening technique.

Robert Smith: For prostate cancer, "get screened" is the wrong message. The message should be "don't duck the issue." We don't know if screening with the Prostate-Specific Antigen (PSA) test will save lives, but even if it is shown to do so, we won't have answered the question of whether every man should be screened, since surgery for prostate cancer is associated with impotence and incontinence. As for colonoscopy, it's the screening test for colon cancer associated with the highest rate of complications. At the moment, there aren't enough trained doctors to perform even enough colonoscopies for people who have symptoms, so screening asymptomatic people at low risk is not justified.

David Atkins: Anecdotes are very powerful, but using anecdotes to teach people about health is like teaching financial advice by covering people who win the lottery. A problem with nearly all types of screens is that they may find an enormous number of "false positives" — people who do not have cancer but who test positive. Most positive tests are false alarms, just like most car alarms going off are false alarms. They find those cancers that may never become serious, resulting in overtreatment and unnecessary side effects. We should be doing something about screening for colon cancer, but we have to remember that money spent on screening for colon cancer will not be spent on other medical needs.

Gun Violence As a Public Health Issue.

November 21, 2000

"Thirty thousand Americans were killed by guns last year. There were fewer than 210 deaths from the Bridgestone-Firestone-related accidents. Yet with the Bridgestone-Firestone incident we got hearings and legislation. The FDA recently took some cold medicines off the market. Less than 600 people were at risk of the complication these medications caused....Guns are specifically exempt from any public safety regulations."

— Robert Seltzer

Programs & Resources

Every day in the United States, about 90 people are killed with guns in suicides, homicides, and accidents. Another 175 are injured, some seriously. The firearm injury rate in the United States is 5 to 10 times greater than that in any other industrialized country. The United States saw a dramatic rise in homicide, affecting mostly young adults and particularly African-American young men, which peaked in the latter half of the 1980s. This rise corresponded with an epidemic of crack cocaine use but also with an increase in handguns. The rate has subsequently fallen, attributed to better law enforcement as well as stricter gun control.

Robert Seltzer: People aren't concerned about the numbers killed by guns because they have the notion that the victims are black, that they're bad people. There's a powerful myth about guns built into American society, and there's a powerful myth about the Second Amendment, which has not been interpreted by courts to mean we have an individual right to bear arms. But we have to recognize the power of this myth. We have to shift the rhetoric from gun control to gun safety. Taking a public-health approach to guns can cut unintentional gun deaths as well as suicides — the major cause of gun deaths and one that is increasing among 15-to-19 year olds — and homicides.

Mike Beard: Firearms may be tools, but they aren't regulated like tools. The presence of a handgun often makes the difference between an argument and a murder, between a depression and a suicide. Not only do we pay in lives, but also in dollars, spending \$1 billion a year on problems caused by handguns. We also pay for it by where we choose to live and send our children to school. The problem is not a rifle or shotgun problem, it is a handgun problem. While we would like to outlaw handguns altogether, until that becomes politically feasible we support handgun licensing and registration.

Paul Blackman: Gun violence is a criminological issue, not one of public health. Virtually all public concern about guns concerns crime, not accidents or suicides. Most research on gun violence is "junk science" — pointless, misguided, and dishonest because it considers only guns, not other aspects that might have led to the deaths, mis-citation of sources, and inflammatory language such as "epidemic." The NRA successfully lobbied to cut off federal funding for a Centers for Disease Control (CDC) research center because the research there was so biased and poorly done.

Is Dr. Kevorkian Killing the Good Stories on Death and Dying?

January 26, 1999

Moderator, Evan W. Cornog, Ph.D.
Columbia Graduate School of Journalism

Who counts: the message or the man? The press, Kevorkian, and the end-of-life debate.
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Pending legislation on end-of-life care.

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A doctor's perspective: "death talk" and pain management.

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A journalist looks at the burgeoning grassroots movement to change end-of-life care.

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ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

- The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation
www.rwjf.org
- Americans for Better Care of the Dying
www.abcd-caring.org
- Center to Improve Care of the Dying
www.gwumc.edu/ihpohv/care.htm
- Medline Death and Dying Information
www.nlm.nih.gov/medlineplus/deathanddying.html
- Death with Dignity National Center
202-969-1669
www.deathwithdignity.org
- Compassion in Dying
503-221-9556
www.compassionindying.org

Should Patients Be Able to Sue Their HMOs? A Debate.

March 2, 1999

Moderator, Martin Gottlieb
The New York Times

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www.familiesusa.org
202-628-3030

Richard I. Smith, Vice President,
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American Association of Health Plans
www.aahp.org
202-778-3202

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

- National Patient Advocate Foundation
www.npaf.org/
- Congressional Budget Office
www.cbo.gov

Grading the Health-Care Report Cards: Are the "Best" Hospitals Really the Best?

April 20, 1999

Moderator, Susan Dentzer, health policy correspondent, *The NewsHour with Jim Lehrer*
703-998-1841

Why U.S. News ranks hospitals—and what does "best hospital" mean, anyway?

Avery Comarow
Editor, "America's Best Hospitals,"
U.S. News and World Report
202-955-2000

"Death-code" creep: can hospital death rates be "adjusted" to take account of sicker patients?

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Do hospital report cards inform? Do they improve the quality of care?

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ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

- HealthGrades
www.healthgrades.com
- National Committee for Quality Assurance
www.ncqa.org
- Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality
www.ahrq.gov



Columbia Graduate School of Journalism

Covering Long-Term Care: A Story for the 21st Century.

October 26, 1999

Moderator

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Rough crossings: caregivers' stories

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Reporting on long-term care insurance

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Understanding the limits of insurance: exploring other alternatives

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ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

■ Health Insurance Association of America
www.hiaa.org

■ National Academy of Social Insurance
Contact: Jill Braunstein
202-452-8097
www.nasi.org

■ Administration on Aging
Contact: Moya Benoit Thompson
202-401-4541
www.aoa.gov

■ Institute for Medicare Practice
Mount Sinai School of Medicine
http://www.mssm.edu/instituteformedicare/

■ International Longevity Center
Robert Butler, M.D.
212-517-1291

■ American Association of Homes and Services for the Aging

www.aahsa.org

Robyn Stone

202-783-2242, extension 9206

■ Family Caregiver Alliance
www.caregiver.org

■ National Alliance for Caregiving
www.caregiving.org

Should Medicare Offer a Prescription Drug Benefit Package?

November 16, 1999

Moderator, George D. Lundberg, M.D.

Editor-in-Chief, *Medscape*

Background and issues

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Why Medicare should offer a prescription drug benefit

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A View from the pharmaceutical industry

Judy H. Bello

Executive Vice-President, Policy and

Strategic Affairs

Pharmaceutical Research and

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ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

■ Health Care Financing Administration
Press office
Joyce Winslow
202-260-4448

■ Congressional Budget Office
Judy Wagner
202-226-2653

■ Robert Reischauer
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■ PRIME Institute

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America's Uninsured: The Search for Solutions.

February 29, 2000

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ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

For more information from the HIAA, visit their web site at: www.insureUSA.org

■ The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation
www.rwjf.org

■ United Hospital Fund
Eleanor Rorer
212-494-0732

■ Physicians for a National Health Program
www.pnhp.org

Election 2000: Decoding the Politics of Health Care.

March 28, 2000

Moderator, George D. Lundberg, M.D.

Editor-in-Chief, *Medscape*

What health issues bring people to the polls?

Who votes how when they get there?

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Analyzing the primaries and forecasting the future: a view from the Right

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Analyzing the primaries and forecasting the future: a view from the Left

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ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

- Alliance for Health Reform
1900 L Street NW, Suite 512, Washington,
DC 20036
202-466-5626.
- American Association of Retired Persons
(AARP)
www.AARP.org
- Kaiser Family Foundation
www.kff.org
- Common Cause
www.commoncause.org

Medical (mis?) Information on the Internet: The Medium and the Messages.

April 25, 2000

Moderator, George D. Lundberg, M.D.
Editor-in-Chief, *Medscape*

E-health: Who is doing what? Why? So what?
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How good is the information?

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Are we prepared for the future?

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ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

- The Cochrane Collaboration
www.cochrane.org
- Agency for Healthcare Research and
Quality
www.ahrq.gov
- Internet Healthcare Coalition
215-504-4164
www.healthcoalition.org

The Power Brokers of New York City's Health Care.

September 26, 2000

Moderator, George D. Lundberg, M.D.
Editor-in-Chief, *Medscape*

Who Uses the System?

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Who Pays? Who Earns?

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Who Decides?

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www.gnyha.org
- New York City Health and Hospitals
Corporation
Contact: Jane Zimmerman, Ph.D.
125 Worth Street, room 510
New York, NY 10013
www.nyc.gov/hhc
212-788-3339
- New York City Dept. of Health
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- New York State Dept. of Health
518-474-7354
- Local 1199
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- Rep. Richard Gottfried
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Does Press Coverage of Celebrity Health Improve Public Health?

October 24, 2000

Moderator, George D. Lundberg, M.D.
Editor-in-Chief, *Medscape*

Barron H. Lerner, M.D., Ph.D.
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ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

- Barnett Kramer, M.D.
Editor, Journal of the National
Cancer Institute
301-496-5641
- National Guideline Clearinghouse
www.guideline.gov/index.asp

Gun Violence as a Public Health Issue.

November 21, 2000

Moderator, George D. Lundberg, M.D.
Editor-in-Chief, *Medscape*

The Problem, and Modest Proposals to Solve It

Robert Seltzer, Ph.D.
Executive Director, Doctors Against
Handgun Injury
212-822-7377; rseltzer@nyam.org

Lawn Darts, Asbestos, and Handguns— Guess Which Isn't Banned?

Mike Beard
President, Coalition to Stop Gun Violence
202-408-0061

A Criminological, Not a Public Health, Issue

Paul H. Blackman, Ph.D.
Research Coordinator,
National Rifle Association Institute for
Legislative Action
703-267-1226; pblackman@nrahq.org

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

- Center to Prevent Handgun Violence
202-289-7319
www.cphv.org
- David Hemenway, Ph.D., Director
Harvard Injury Control Research Center
Harvard School of Public Health
617-432-4493
hemenway@hsph.harvard.edu
- Gary Kleck
School of Criminology and
Criminal Justice
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The Lower case

British foot-in-mouth remedy: massive slaughter

The Gazette (Colorado Springs, Colo.) 3/16/01

Teenage llama suspect held in 1998 stabbing

St. Petersburg (Fla.) Times 3/21/01

But let's look at the house again from the front, where the entrance foyer is flanked by a formal living room and dining room. Double closets in the foyer provide plenty of space to hang your coats and guests.

The Herald-Sun (Durham, N.C.) 9/9/00

■ His 23rd gal of the season moves him into third place on all-time scoring.

The Morning Call (Allentown, Pa.) 3/20/01

Fontana defends its rise in crime

The Press-Enterprise (Riverside, Calif.) 3/22/01

Attorney G. Clinton Gaston and Nicole Tate, one of the women named in the civil rights actions suit against the Chicago Police Department explain the gruesome accounts of what she encountered during a *Chicago Defender* interview.

Chicago Defender 1/31/01



Ken Oden:
Travis County attorney says he has no plans to prosecute anyone.

Austin American-Statesman 2/12/01

Cardiac arrest is still rare under age 35, accounting for just 1 percent of all deaths resulting from it.

San Francisco Chronicle 3/2/01

Accident Victim Was

The Hartford (Conn.) Courant 3/17/01

Sharped-eyed youngsters find mistakes in book

The Vancouver Sun 10/25/00

Nearly 300 exhibitors brought press kits to the IMTS Press Room. Most went home with journalists.

International Manufacturing Technology Show Update September 2000

Judges Honored for Juvenile Work

The Recorder 2/23/01 An American Lawyer Media Publication

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